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## AUSTRIAN LITERATURE

## Exactitude with ecstasy

S. S. Prawer

ROBERT MUSIL

Briefe 1901-1942  
Volume One: Text. 1485pp.  
3498 04269 6  
Volume Two: Commentary and Indices. 848pp.  
3498 04270 X  
Edited by Adolf Frisé  
Reinbek: Rowohlt

Musil was not a man for baning his soul to all and sundry; but his letters retain their interest as personal documents because from the very beginning they appear related, like almost everything else he did, to his literary work. His studies, his reading, the rhythm of his life, were increasingly geared to the task of producing one great novel. After a librarian's post he held for a time was abolished and he was made redundant, he abandoned all thoughts of making his living in some bourgeois occupation. If Rilke could live for his literary work alone, so could he. But his modest family fortune disappeared in the inflation, and he exhibited none of Rilke's talent for securing the patronage of rich and titled ladies. Reading the letters made available in this new edition one comes to realize to bow great an extent Ulrich, the hero of *The Man Without Qualities*, represents his author's fondest dream: Ulrich has the means to take a holiday from life in the material comfort which Musil himself, in the later years of his existence, so conspicuously lacked. The letters show clearly how much worse their writer's position became after the advent of Hitler forced him, first out of Germany, and then, after the Anschluss, out of his native Austria too. This proud and upright man, whose decision to leave Hitler's Reich was dictated by disgust at cruelty and vulgarity (what a key-letter of June 11, 1933 calls "nackte Hässlichkeit") and not simply by loyalty to his Jewish-born wife, was forced, in his later years in Switzerland, to live almost entirely on charity. We see him carrying on in his work, or trying to do so in face of increasing ill-health and nervous prostration, in an atmosphere of uncertainty in which, sometimes, he literally did not know where his next meal was coming from or where he might find a quiet room and bed. The letters and commentaries allow us to see that he was, in fact, helped by many individuals who were themselves anything but rich; the Foundations and Corporations whom he approached

with requests for Fellowships or Bursaries after his emigration usually turned him down. Musil's devotion to his work was loyalty and protectively (over-protectively sometimes) furthered by his wife. The cares of their daily life together devolved mainly upon her, and it was she who wrote to various correspondents (including a daughter from an earlier marriage) about their struggles, about everything, in fact, which was not directly related to her husband's literary work. Adolf Frisé therefore decided to reprint her letters as well as Musil's; and this decision proves a wise one, for only in combination do these letters give us a complete picture of the Musils' day-to-day existence. Frisé also includes, in his volume of text, letters from other correspondents among them Hauptmann, Hofmannsthal, Döblin, Thomas Mann and Etraim Frisch, who concerned themselves with Musil's affairs and tried to help him in various ways. In this way Musil's own letters are placed in their context and, on occasions, corrected and "relativized" even before the reader turns to the Commentary volume. Such placing is often necessary: the generous letters which we see Thomas Mann, for instance, writing to others on Musil's behalf show Mann in a much better light than Musil's often acid comments about him would lead one to expect. Musil is equally unfair to his publisher Gotfried Bermann Fischer - but given the nature of his work and the slowness of its progress, his relations with publishers were bound to be uneasy. This goes for Ernst Rowohlt too, and much amusement can be derived from reading Musil's less than flattering remarks about him in volumes published under the imprint of the house that Rowohlt built. Reading these letters makes one appreciate the point of view of those who argue that Musil would have done better if he had not allowed *The Man Without Qualities* to come out in instalments; he should, rather, have made every effort to complete his novel - as he did his earlier writings - before authorizing publication of any part of it. The published portions seem to have hampered him because they were out there, in the world, being read. Print appears to have clamped his characters into fixed positions, and that impeded his invention in ways the nineteenth-century masters of serial publication would not have understood. And so he went on and on, revising, discarding, resurrecting, discarding again, revising again, with increasing spells of deep depression and inability to work, falling dead at last, in his sixty-second year, in the midst of a mass of papers and drafts which only the devoted labours of a generation of editors - Adolf Frisé foremost among them - has been able to reduce to some sort of order.

Yet, paradoxically enough, this incompleteness has proved an essential part of the appeal that *The Man Without Qualities* has for many of its readers. There is a special fascination that comes from a work left unfinished - from a fragment that impels our thought and fantasy in a certain direction but circumvents or limits them less than a fully rounded work would do. The German Romantics, masters of the fragment, knew about this appeal; and it seems strangely appropriate that Musil's novel has taken its place alongside Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* among the most admired and cherished unfinished works of German literature. Much of the activity of writing, deleting and revising which is evoked by Musil's letters and fully documented in Frisé's edition of his Collected Works might nowadays be described as "deconstruction". The "gesture of turning reason against itself, to bring out its tacit dependence on another, repressed and unrecognized, level of meaning", described in Christopher Norris's recent book *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (reviewed in the *TLS*, July 9) is one that becomes very familiar to readers of Robert Musil; and the dangers of pre-emptive closure and conceptual rigidity, against which our modern deconstructors so often warn us, are at the heart of *The Man Without Qualities* - they are part, indeed, of its central theme, the theme André Gide himself when he offered the phrase "l'homme disponible" as an adequate equivalent of "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften". If ever there was a work that demands, to use Norris's formulation again, "paradoxical 'double readings', intended to show how novels display their own artifice even when exploiting the realist mode", it is Musil's unfinished masterpiece (if ever an author takes on the role of deconstructing his own writings, it is Musil: the Musil whom we can watch, in his letters and in the variant readings assembled in Frisé's edition of *The Man Without Qualities*, struggling with his fiction in draft after draft, undoing closure again and again.

Despite the interest attaching to the later letters from Switzerland, lovers of Musil's novels and plays, and literary theorists and critics, will find more to engage them in letters written before the Swiss years; before sickness, worry, poverty, and growing disenchantment with the very act of writing took their toll. Future writers on the German *Novelle*, for instance, will have to take into account what Musil says about the special fitness of this genre for the depiction of inwardness, in a series of letters written to Franz Blei in 1911. Future writers on theories of Tragedy in the twentieth century will do well to ponder what Musil has to say on this subject in an epistle addressed to Matthias G. Casper. And readers of Frisé's earlier editions of Musil's fragments and letters will not be surprised to find him again and again commenting intelligently and sardonically on cultural and socio-political affairs. In his later letters he had to be very sparing with such comments; he never knew into what hands his missives might fall.

The most valuable passages to be found in the earlier pages of these volumes, however, are those which afford us insights into the young writer's work-processes, his ways of reading, his search for what previous ages would have called "inspiration". A typical example presents itself in the first of three letters to a lady whose salon Musil had attended while doing a spell of soldiering in the district around Graz. At least we think the letter was addressed to her: only the draft has been found, and that does not reveal the name of the addressee. It can be dated, however, between May 31 and June 2, 1902, and that makes Mme Stefanie Tykca the most likely recipient. The letter speaks of Musil's struggles "zwischen Hirn und verlängertem Mark"; struggles, that is, between the rational and instinctive parts of his nature - to which must be added, as he goes on to say, struggles between the delight in rational observation and speculation (natural to a student of engineering and philosophy) and a more "lyrical" impulse (no less natural in an admirer of Rilke). He then describes his peculiar way of reading at this time: not great gulps, but taking in one sentence at a time, then stepping to the window with something in his hand - a piece of paper, perhaps, or a box of matches - and staring out for sometimes ten, twenty minutes, before returning to his book. His organism, he writes, seemed to demand that cumbersome procedure. Was it some congenital weakness, was it male hysteria (Freud and Breuer, it seems, had not written in vain), or was there some profound hidden purpose in such premeditated demands? He then goes on to describe the contrasting moods in which he finds himself at this period: not moods, perhaps ("Stimmung ist wohl nicht das richtige Wort"), but something more imperious and pervasive - a complex of opinions, hopes, endeavours all opening a prospect onto a path he felt impelled to follow because he sensed that it would lead him to a desirable goal - to his goal. To step onto such a path, he explains to his correspondent, implied total dedication and commitment; not only the rational self but the whole person, the man of flesh and blood as well as the man of reason, was involved. Even art could become a means of exalting the self in ways that could mimic the very notion of the individual "person" interchangeable with that of "sensitivity" in its widest sense - "Sinnlichkeit im weitesten Begriffe." He felt this state of sensual exaltation to be connected with his vocation for art; yet when the experience was upon him he tended - slides of Werther! - to lie back without troubling to write anything down, giving himself up to what he calls "Selbstvernichtung", self-annihilation. Musil knew, of course, that artistic creation meant work and clear-sighted planning; but he also knew that the "spell" he tried to describe in his letter was necessary to him. He would therefore induce such experiences by auto-suggestion or (as he ominously adds) by some other means. When he came out of his trance-like states he would retain a feeling that something obscure but essential, something he needed but also something beyond comprehension, had enriched his life. One thing he did comprehend, however, one thing certainly he did bring back from these excursions: the certainty that the work he had to do would require tremendous concentration. "And since I lacked this," he added, with wry self-regard, "I did no work of art, and I don't regard this as too great a loss."

It is easy to see the origin of a good deal of this in Nietzsche and in Rilke; but that does not devalue the insights it affords us into the sensibility of the young writer who was about to launch *The Confusions of Young Törless* into

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the world. It takes us, in fact, well beyond *Törless* – for here we see already Musil's drive towards combining intellectual and spiritual "exactitude" with a secular analogy of mystical ecstasy which he was to call "der andere Zustand", the "other state". In *The Man Without Qualities*, this early letter even looks forward to, and partly explains, the inability to sustain the tremendous concentration necessary, and the consequent inability to produce a finished work, which so distressed the author in his last years. He did not relish the writings of Thomas Mann, but there is one sentence by Mann which he quotes in his letters with entire approval: the sentence which defines the writer as a man who finds writing more difficult than other people.

The interest which attaches to this first letter to Stefanica Tryka attaches also to the two other drafts intended for this same correspondent. The one dated March 22, 1905 contains a valuable analysis of what Musil had tried to achieve in *Young Törless* and in what respects this novel had fallen short of his own artistic ideal. From the first, we see, we are concerned with his published work goes hand in hand with a strong sense of his own worth as a writer. The novel he would have liked to produce, he tells Mrs Tryka, would not be taken for a sensitive psychological study of rounded possible characters. It would like to have presented "psychological lines of gravity" ("Schwerlinien") with the help of deliberately constructed figures of whom readers would ask, not: "is this man consistent?", but rather: "is this man consistent?" If he could have achieved consistency of this kind, he adds, the "impossibility" of his imagined figures would have made him value them even more. Here, once again, we look beyond *Törless* to the later portions of *The Man Without Qualities*.

No one can read these letters without feeling how deeply, how committedly Austrian Musil was, despite his clear-eyed vision of the weaknesses and wickedness of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire and its post-1918 successor. From these volumes we can gain, for the first time, a full picture of this great Austrian's endeavour, throughout the years he spent in Switzerland, not to see himself, and not to allow others to see him, as an emigrant, a refugee or an exile. Even after the Second World War had broken out he kept up the fiction that it was only the precarious state of his health which kept him from returning to his native country. Despite his poverty he somehow organized funds to pay the rent on his flat in Vienna, hoping to go back to his desk and his old papers once the barbarians had been driven beyond the gates. He fought strenuously, with the help of lawyers who could not have hoped for fees, to keep the Viennese city authorities from requisitioning his flat. His efforts proved vain. In the end, and the consequent agitation no doubt heightened his death.

The letters also show his struggles to keep his published work before his Austrian and German readership – only to find that despite his impeccably "Aryan" ancestry (of which he had several times been required to furnish proof) the published portions of *The Man Without Qualities* and the characteristically titled *Requiem for a German* had been placed on the Nazi black list. Unsold copies simply disappeared from the publishers' warehouses as well as the bookshops. What public was struggling so hard to address? Who would read his works if they were barred from Austria and Germany? Among German-speaking Europeans, only the Swiss were free to buy and peruse his writings – and they seemed to take little interest in them, even though he was occasionally asked to read from his works to some literary society or other. Even Pastor Lejeune and his family, who again and again helped and sustained the Musils during their time in Switzerland, did so from humanitarian motives without any real understanding of their protégé's literary achievement. The USA, where Thomas Mann and Hermann Broch had been received with open arms, did seem eager to welcome Musil in the same way. Though there was at least one American, Henry Hall, who had some inkling of his greatness, Musil's glowing letters to Church and his wife Mary that he was grateful for their understanding and

sympathy which translated themselves, whenever possible, into financial help.

In England too Musil was all but unknown in his life-time, though his letters refer with pride to reviews of his writings that appeared, in the 1930s, in the *Times Literary Supplement*. He was also sent a copy of *German Life and Letters* in which one of his prose-pieces appeared in a translation by Horace Campion, with an accompanying appreciation from the pen of Professor L. A. Willoughby which linked Musil's name to those of Proust and Joyce. Writing in 1937-8, Willoughby added: "Musil's intellectualism, needless to say, does not meet with approval in modern Germany where it is deemed as 'an escape from the organic.' But we in England can still enjoy the metaphysical abstractions and psychological dissections of this brilliant Austrian without feeling that the foundations of the state are thereby imperilled. . . . There is no translation into English."

This last sentence, describing the state of affairs that Horace Campion was attempting to remedy, raises a question. In a letter to Klaus Pinkus dated March 15, 1934 we find Musil referring to help he had received from "some English friends, notably my translator Gullick". A rapid search through the relevant bibliographies has failed to turn up any published translation of Musil's works from the pen of Norman Gullick. Had Musil perhaps been given to understand that Gullick was the anonymous reviewer who had discussed Volume I of *The Man Without Qualities* in the *TLS* of November 19 1937? Had Gullick broached the possibility of translating that novel in a letter to Musil which has been lost or has escaped Professor Fris's vigilance? Perhaps some reader of this review holds the solution to the puzzle.

Musil was not a man who dashed his thoughts down onto paper in an undisciplined rush; his letters, like his other writings, are carefully composed German prose, whose pellucid construction, rhythmic subtlety and euphony serve the expression of frequently complex thoughts and feelings. Again and again Musil surprises and delights his correspondents with apt images. To Franz Blei he writes about his struggles to make his written words conform to his vision: "Do you know, I constantly have the feeling that it may only look as though deep down in the waters of my forgotten self – the self that has vanished from view – some city of coral were growing upwards. What is it that will come to the surface in the end?"

Won't it just be an old box of bricks?"

To another correspondent he complains of the physical weakness that is preventing him from getting on with his writing; he feels tortured, he explains, "by this stupidity of the body, which rebels against its rider like a horse that refuses to cross a bridge". A little later he suggests some of the qualities he would like to see in a publisher's proof-reader by calling him "a Prussian, language-traffic policeman", "ein preussischer Sprachverkehrsschutzmann". Most characteristic of all, perhaps, is this paragraph from a letter to Rolf Langnese dated January 20, 1942: the last year, that is, of Musil's life.

Imagine a buffalo whose mighty horns have been replaced by another skin-formation: by two ridiculously sensitive combs. This creature, with its powerful forehead that formerly bore weapons but now has combs instead, stands for the man in exile. If he has been a king, he will talk of the crown he once wore, feeling all the while that those who hear him doubt whether it was even a hat. In the end he himself comes to question whether he still has a head on his shoulders. This situation is sad, but almost equally ridiculous – and that makes it doubly sad.

Not since Heine have the degradations and humiliations of exile been so powerfully expressed in the German language.

One could go on and on quoting such memorable felicities, which are either entirely original (like the language-traffic policeman and the buffalo with combs) or variations on traditional images (like the Platonic body-horse that rebels against its rider). The clarity of these letters, their ability to convey shades of meaning exactly and wittily, appear wrested from silence by a man ever conscious, as he says in an early letter to Johannes von Allesch, of finding companions who share his feelings that there are boundaries in situations in which words are of no avail:

Zu sagen ist nichts vor diesen stumm hinzunehmenden Dingen, aber da es doch eben Dinge sind, die einem an die äusserste Grenze führen, mag es vielleicht gut sein, zu schreiben, dass man nicht allein ist.

It is Musil's own striving for precision of thought and utterance which lends force and weight to his dismissal of Spengler's *Decline of the West* at a time when others were bowled over by the latter's breadth of reference and supposed erudition: "To attempt a factual refutation would be a task without end. He throws false

analogies about with such abandon that the little truth which is to be found in his work comes inextricably tangled in a skein of error." Hofmannsthal, as so often, hit the nail on the head when he commended Musil, in a letter he wrote to Otto von Gemmingen in 1926, as an unusually intelligent man who had his own view of all things and knew how to find splendid formulations for such views: "ein so ungewöhnlich geschneider Mensch, der zu allen Dingen eigene Ansichten hat und sie ausgezeichnet formuliert."

Let us look, in conclusion, at a letter in which we find Musil sitting down to answer, in January 1931, a somewhat precious but astutely questioning letter from a young scholar who had been reading the recently published first part of *The Man Without Qualities*. In this reply Musil is at pains to stress that he had never followed the fashion of regarding the intellect as the enemy of feeling; intellect and feeling are brothers, though (as happens in families) they are often estranged. The word "semi-mental" should be given back the dignity it had in an earlier, Romantic period; its two parts bring together what should never have been dissociated. What, then, is meant by a "Mann ohne Eigenschaften", a man without "qualities" or "characteristics"? He is one who helps, Musil explains, to overcome dissociation by refusing premature closure; he allows diverse elements, the best elements of his time that have not achieved synthesis, to come together in him. "Ein Mann, der möglichst viele der besten, aber nirgends zur Synthese gelangten Zeitelemente in sich vereint." How adequate this description is to what the author actually shows us of his hero in the unfinished novel need not concern us here. What we should note, rather, is that the name of the young scholar who elicited this explanation was Adolf Fris. Little did Musil know that this would be the man who would dedicate his life to the task of bringing his work before the public in as full and authentic a form as was humanly possible. The latest and last fruit of this dedication is now before us; and like Fris's other editions it will be eagerly used by generations of readers.

This is not to say, however, that no revision is necessary. Further letters will come to light, and some of those who refused to co-operate with Fris may have a change of heart and allow the full text of their holdings to be published. It is quite obvious, moreover, that despite inserted errata-slips all is not well with some of the text in English. We find "handsight" instead of "hindsight", "tough"

These are teething-troubles; they should not be allowed to distract us from appreciation of the considerable achievement the edition represents. The appearance of these two weighty volumes is a cause for congratulation and celebration. They mark the final stage in Adolf Fris's labours in the service of an author whose major work was left unfinished when he died, unexpectedly, exactly forty years ago. It has been the labour of a life time, and has posed editorial problems of a complexity exceeded only by those which faced the editors of Hölderlin's posthumous papers. Editing the letters demanded skills different from those required for assessing the degree of weight to be given to competing drafts of *The Man Without Qualities*; skills which included the gathering of an immense amount of information to elucidate Musil's cryptic references and to penetrate the disguises he and his correspondents had to assume in order to deceive the malevolent eyes of Nazi censors or other officials. Diplomacy was necessary too: many important documents are owned by private collectors, some of whom proved less than helpful when they were requested, often many times, to make the text of their holdings available. Some letters, known to be still extant, have remained inaccessible; but several of these are represented by quotations, and other details from auctioneers' catalogues. Most helpful of all was Musil's habit of making careful drafts of his letters before sending fair copies to their intended recipients. This meant that even when Musil's correspondents had thrown the precious originals away, their content could be recovered from one, two or even three drafts preserved first by Musil himself and then by his widow.

It is not only Musil who is indebted to the scholar whose letter he answered so fully and courteously in 1931. After his struggles with formidable textual and organizational difficulties, and after weathering the stormy controversies his endeavours only seemed to attract, Adolf Fris has now just assured of gratitude and esteem from the ever-growing community of those who hear his writings held in such high regard. The voices that would lead him to be without further delay to the twentieth century Europe.

## AUSTRIAN LITERATURE



Lieutenant Robert Musil in 1903.

instead of "tough", "husbands" instead of "husbands", "French" instead of "French" – to say nothing of such gibberish as the following attributed to Barbara Church: "I have no letters, my husband did not keep any after he answered those he was interested in." Patient scrutiny and comparison with the originals seem to be needed. A revised edition would also do well to eliminate unnecessary repetition: on page 689 of the Commentary volume the same quotation occurs twice in the space of a dozen lines.

These are teething-troubles; they should not be allowed to distract us from appreciation of the considerable achievement the edition represents. The appearance of these two weighty volumes is a cause for congratulation and celebration. They mark the final stage in Adolf Fris's labours in the service of an author whose major work was left unfinished when he died, unexpectedly, exactly forty years ago. It has been the labour of a life time, and has posed editorial problems of a complexity exceeded only by those which faced the editors of Hölderlin's posthumous papers. Editing the letters demanded skills different from those required for assessing the degree of weight to be given to competing drafts of *The Man Without Qualities*; skills which included the gathering of an immense amount of information to elucidate Musil's cryptic references and to penetrate the disguises he and his correspondents had to assume in order to deceive the malevolent eyes of Nazi censors or other officials. Diplomacy was necessary too: many important documents are owned by private collectors, some of whom proved less than helpful when they were requested, often many times, to make the text of their holdings available. Some letters, known to be still extant, have remained inaccessible; but several of these are represented by quotations, and other details from auctioneers' catalogues. Most helpful of all was Musil's habit of making careful drafts of his letters before sending fair copies to their intended recipients. This meant that even when Musil's correspondents had thrown the precious originals away, their content could be recovered from one, two or even three drafts preserved first by Musil himself and then by his widow.

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## RUSSIAN LITERATURE

## The urge to survive

Dan Jacobson

ELLIOTT MOSMAN (Editor)

The Correspondence of Boris Pasternak and Olga Freidenberg 1910-1954

365pp. Secker and Warburg. £15. 0.436 28855 9

This book is a more complicated affair than its title perhaps suggests. It is in fact a kind of montage or palimpsest: it contains not only the letters exchanged over more than forty years between Boris Pasternak and his cousin Olga Freidenberg, but also linking and explanatory passages from what is called a "retrospective diary" by Olga Freidenberg. This is evidently an autobiographical account of some of the major phases of her life; it is presumably incorporates material from contemporary diaries. The editor of the letters also provides us with a general introduction, as well as shorter introductions to each of the sections into which the book is divided. Finally, the book includes about fifty pages of photographs of various generations of Pasternaks and Freidenbergs, and their joint family connections. Like the anaphors in everyone else's family album, these are touching and amusing; like those in any other album, they make us feel as if almost nothing else can be said about the passage of time. The *laissez-passer* preposterously high on a list worn by Olga Freidenberg; the real lives of the hedgerow in front of which the middle-aged, shirt-sleeved poet stands; his strained smile at nothing in particular; his sulkily equine good looks – everything, like the uncles and aunts and the dog-carts in which they all or the flights of steps on which they are artfully disposed, is ultimately as perishable as everything else.

Another complication within the book relates not just to its structure but to the character of one of its authors. Olga Freidenberg conscientiously kept the letters written to her by her cousin; considering the promise of his youth and the achievement of his maturity, this is perhaps unremarkable in itself. She has made and kept drafts or copies of her letters to him – which seems to me quite another kettle of fish, psychologically speaking. The editor remarks in his introduction that the compilation differs from most collections of letters in being a two-way affair; he does not, however, appear to be struck by the oddity of his heroine's practice, sustained over decades, of carefully making and preserving copies of what are in some cases virtually love-letters to her cousin, or what purport to be whimsical effusions or angry expostulations to him.

One cannot but associate the self-consciousness this practice reveals with the writer's inclination or ambition to see herself, and to write about herself, as if she were the heroine of an unfolding novel or drama. Haughty, impetuous, passionate, mysterious, something between Tolstoy's Natasha and Chekhov's Nina in *The Seagull*, that seems to be the style she is looking for, especially in the earlier letters. "If only autumn comes quickly, my beloved autumn! I shall go away, I shall save myself from myself." "Some people have been way-stations for me; I saw them from a distance, knew that they were still far away, and that I would not overtake them soon. . . . After straining forward with all my might, after an unbelievable concentration of will, I discovered I had sped past them without even stopping. Then an ineffable sadness seized me." And so forth. Not only, I repeat, did Olga Freidenberg write of herself to another in these terms; she also carefully preserved the records of her having done so, just in case her correspondent failed to do it.

Well, in the end her life did turn out to be a heroic and tragic one; or at least to contain heroic and tragic elements. She became the first woman to hold a chair in her university; the scholarly work to which she had devoted many years of toil was banned by the Soviet authorities three weeks after its publication; she then had to survive the prominence of her position, as an intellectual, a woman, a Jew, and an academic whose children had been killed in the war.

It is not a state of mind which makes for lively letters; or even, sometimes, for comprehensible ones. There are passages in this book when one knows that Pasternak is talking eloquently about himself, but does not know what he is saying; one begins to suspect that the function of the eloquence is to achieve that very effect. Conversely, there are a few occasions when the prominence of her position, as an intellectual, a woman, a Jew, and an academic whose children had been killed in the war.

It is as well that there are other letters which not only speak of the poems and of *Doctor Zhivago*, but remind us of their qualities. Many of these letters have a kind of moody, bustling responsiveness to what is around him, as well as a suddenly becalmed passivity or patience, which is characteristic of Pasternak's poetry; there are also some descriptions of people and places which bring together wonder and matter-of-factness in a manner which is both peculiar to the writer and yet characteristic of the entire tradition to which he belongs. As, for example, in this description of a former nanny to the children, who suddenly reappeared after a long absence:

She came back a sad figure, smiling enigmatically. Strange things were happening to her; one misfortune followed another. On a rainy night two days before the death of her former mistress she knocked at our door – dirty, rain-soaked, with definite signs of fever. We took her in and put her to bed, still smiling enigmatically, and she immediately fell asleep, her temperature 100°. In the morning it turned out that a short while ago, while moving her things to a new place (who knows how many that make!) she dragged her heavy basket out of the streetcar to the sidewalk, and, leaving it there with the intention of coming back for it, set off, address in hand (she cannot read), to find her new employers. When, having found them, she returned to the tram-stop, of course all trace of the basket had disappeared, and it contained her own defence and money. We gave her sanctuary. She is terribly slovenly, walks around barefoot with unkempt hair, snatches fish tails from neighbours' window-sills, and then, having borrowed five rubles from someone, orders a pastry with whipped cream and treats everyone in the kitchen of this dancely populated apartment.

The Western reader will perhaps be as struck as much by those fish tails on the neighbours' window-sills (what are they doing there?) as by anything else in the passage. It goes on in the same vein for another half-page, unfurling but wistfully heaping strangeness upon strangeness to the end.

Olga Freidenberg never married. Towards the end of her life the thought of her cousin's fame appears to have grown more and more important to her: it is as if those millions of people all over the world who knew of his work had become something of a substitute for the immediate family she had never had, and also a consolation of sorts for the deaths and dispersals which had inevitably overtaken this larger family of which she had been a member. After her death Pasternak sent money and a series of rather chilling messages to an aged relative who had conscientiously arranged for her burial, and who was trying to make sure that her scholarly writings would be published. Her work, he wrote, would be published, or not, by her university, and there was nothing that anyone else could do about it; people's memories of others survive of themselves, and never as a result of any deliberate attempt to achieve that end; it is not for the living to arrange the affairs of the dead. Such self-confidence (for that is what Pasternak's half-truths ultimately express) had always been beyond the reach of his cousin. His admonitions provide an ironic conclusion to the book. In preserving her own letters, as well as his, Olga Freidenberg had made a great effort over many years to preempt the decision of posterity.

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Alianza Editorial

## Persuasion at the pictures

Paul Smith

NICHOLAS PRONAY and D. W. SPRING (Editors)  
Propaganda, Politics and Film,  
1918-45  
302pp. Macmillan. £25.  
0 333 30939 1

Where Lenin and Ludendorff agreed, it was not for lesser men to doubt. Film was a powerful instrument in the age of mass political mobilization. The thesis of this collection is that the need to manage mass elections, muster conscript armies, and orchestrate or contain popular movements forced twentieth-century politicians to come to terms with the revolution in mass communications which offered new means of operating upon popular opinion. Gaining control over the formation of working-class opinion, Nicholas Pronay contends, "came to be seen by the political leaders of post-war Britain as the most essential step upon which everything else depended, including survival for the political system itself".

Ten of these thirteen studies rely on the example of Britain to show how film figured in the domain of political propaganda from the end of the First World War to the close of the Second. The omission of any treatment of the world's greatest democracy, the United States, and of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, two of the most assiduous exploiters of film as part of a coherent state propaganda, means that France has to provide the only "democratic" comparison and the Soviet Union the only "totalitarian". The British model probably exaggerates the degree of negative censorship characteristic of the western democracies. The Weimar, American, and (it appears from Elizabeth Strelitz's chapter) French republics were all a good deal more liberal than the island monarchy when it came to politically charged films: *La Grande Illusion*, the box-office leader of 1937 in France, could hardly have been made or widely distributed in Britain. It gives, top, a somewhat limited and anemic impression of the possibilities of film for positive propaganda, which, even in wartime, could perhaps be fully realized only in states with régimes whose politics were largely conceived in highly theatrical, hence visually striking, terms.

Like other nations, Britain had made considerable propaganda use of film during the First World War, but the scurry back to "normality" after the Armistice included the immediate dismantling of the Ministry of Information and the near-absolute ban on positive propaganda effort which had always been awkwardly with the quiet confidence that British values would ultimately triumph by virtue of their self-evident superiority. As late as 1938, Horace Wilson, quoted by Philip Taylor in this volume, wrote: "I find myself unable to show enthusiasm for propaganda by this country and I still cannot bring myself to believe that it is a good substitute for calmly getting on with the business of Government, including a rational foreign policy." But Taylor also quotes Curzon's grudging acknowledgment at the beginning of 1919 that gentlemen might have to steel themselves to do distasteful things: "a complete and contemptuous silence, however gratifying to our self-respect, is no longer a profitable policy in times when advertisement - whether of past achievement or future aims - is, perhaps unfortunately, almost a universal practice of nations as of individuals." Taylor (in a chapter often taken by the recent publication of his *The Projection of Britain*) and David Ellwood show how some attempt continued to be made between the wars by bodies like the British Council to create a favourable image of Britain in foreign countries, even if it was not always very imaginatively pursued, as when Swiss cinemas asking for British films received (but did not show) two "one showing the propaganda at Eastbourne and a new type, the other similar, but in a different setting".

governing circles showed limited interest in using film as an instrument of active propaganda but a good deal in preventing the appearance on the screen of images and ideas subversive of constituted authority. A revealing, if grammatically bewildering, piece by Pronay argues that the activity of the British Board of Film Censors was directed essentially to politics rather than moral censorship, in the closest co-operation with the world of politics and government, represented on the Board itself by presidents like Shortt and Tyrrell (respectively a former home secretary and a former permanent head of the Foreign Office) and by the secretary, Brooke-Wilkinson - all with substantial experience in propaganda and counter-subversion work. Conflicts of capital and labour, and scenes tending to



Michael Redgrave in *The Way to the Stars* (1945). Anthony Asquith's moving film, scripted by Terence Rattigan, about a single RAF station between 1940 and 1944. This still accompanies an article by Geoff Brown on "Europe at War" in *Movies of the Forties*, edited by Ann Lloyd (1979pp. Orbis. £7.95. 0 85613 454 6).

disparage public characters and institutions" or "holding up the King's uniform to contempt or ridicule" or depicting "White Men in a state of degradation amidst Far Eastern and Native surroundings" could not be shown. Presumably this was all right with the men who controlled the cinema industry because, apart from coinciding well enough with their own political leanings, it kept off their property material which might lead to audience disturbances and legal prosecution.

Yet was it only this that deprived Britain in the 1920s and 1930s of a socially and politically vigorous cinema, and obliged audiences - if we accept Peter Stead's intriguing suggestion - to get their social reality from Hollywood in an idiom which may have been foreign but corresponded better to the life they knew than the stereotypes and conventions of the domestic product? "Non-theatrical" distribution - and, from film, offered ways round the stranglehold of the censorship and the censors and a means of presenting an alternative view of British society: why were they not more successfully exploited? Only part of the answer is offered here. The documentary movement is roughly deviated as the largely irrelevant and peripheral activity of a self-indulgent, mutually admiring cultural élite. Pronay finds Orson Welles innocent in the sphere of politics and propaganda, "well and truly seen through and manipulated by the Civil Service and their masters". The labour movement's lack of energy in employing film as a political medium is also noted. What is not explored, however, is the role of film in the

communication, is the question of whether the nature of the medium was recalcitrant to attempts to employ it as a vehicle for overt political propaganda, as such propaganda was then conceived.

Most European politicians were well behind the technological game. This was perhaps especially true of the left, not least the British left. Word-oriented, print-possessed, wedded to the inculcation of ideas and principles through verbal analysis and argument, relying heavily for its organizational growth on the conjunction of a working-class tradition of self-improvement with the earnest didactic impulse of middle-class intellectuals, it could not catch the idiom of the film. The Workers Educational Association and the Roxy did not mix. As Bert Hogenkamp notes, in his chapter on

power. They were less tied to rationalist forms and more willing to think advertising beneficial to mankind. Baldwin, as John Ramer shows, having nothing to say at all saying it with reassuring gentility, came over well on film, neatly packaged by the newsreel companies whose sympathies inclined to the wrecking job on innocent Major Aldrich in the 1935 election, when Baldwin's scriptwriter was able to see Aldrich's text before composing the Prime Minister's).

Film suited the politics of appeasement, the politics of comfortable humanism, next, and the politics of earliest progressivism, not at all. Or so one might argue; but whether accurately or not is hard to say from this symposium, where the nature of the relationship between political persuasion and film expression is scarcely examined. The late Tom Harrison's contribution, based on the experience of *Mass Observation*, does however toss large hand-grenade into the discussion by raising the question of whether conscious propaganda with film makes much impact anyway. Surveying the home propaganda effort in the Second World War, Pronay makes much of the power of the newsreels, reaching twenty million people a week, against the most theatrical offering of the Ministry of Information's film division, reaching perhaps ten million a year. Yet he acknowledges that the effect of relentless presentation of an initially unsuccessful war was seriously to erode their popularity. Harrison's data prompt a more radical conclusion: that as early as 1940 audiences were fed up with the newsreels, which had aggravated by thumpingly insistent, heavily verbal propaganda what had always been something of an intrusion into a warm, dark world of entertainment and release. The survivors all that E. V. H. Emmett and Leslie Mitchell could throw at them through the blessed capacity to take notice which keeps most of us sane. Harrison doubted that wartime films had anything to do with morale, as elusive concept which he, Lord Horder, Julian Huxley, Richard Crossman and others met periodically to try to define. He was probably right. War is up to a point good for morale in itself. It gets people off asprins and gives them something to think about. The problem is to invent a peaceful substitute.

The book is full of useful material for the study of the interaction of politics and film, derived from much original research, and will give a valuable stimulus to further work and debate. Parts of it, unfortunately, are written in an English that should never have passed the sub-editor's pen. "With the spectre of facing Germany as a nation disunited along class lines, watching anxiously the progress of those vilest of workers, the Crips, harangued by the arms and munitions against the capitalist Imperialist Tory Government, realising from intelligence reports the existence of pockets of ideological reason, the identification between politics and propaganda and more broadly between communications and politics was very strong indeed". There is a good deal of carelessness: Sir George becomes "Rachael" (Cave and Rachael becomes "Rachel" Low, the author of the major work on film censorship appears consistently as "Hunning") and is as consistently misquoted. *An Appreciation of the Cinema* is not the title of Thorold Dickinson's book, nor is the alternative bid in the reference. What figures in the introduction as the French Telegraph Act of 1900 has changed its date and its wording by Chapter Eight. The British Council's 1938-39 grant goes up from £160,000 on page 44 to £200,000 on page 37, we hear of "Lord William Tyrrell" and the "13th Select Committee on National Expenditure". The French prove as scrutable as ever: we have "Dolmen" (with its mysterious "light-house"), "La Jeunesse Patriote", "grandes boulevards". On page 24 three lines are printed twice, which makes no sense anyway.

## In the aquarium

Roger Scruton

ALAN WATKINS

Brief Lives  
With illustrations by Marc  
222pp. Hamish Hamilton. £8.95.  
0 241 08890 X

Alan Watkins claims to have been more influenced by Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* than by Aubrey, from whom he borrows his title. In truth, the book is as remote from Johnson as Fleet Street journalism is from literature, a fact which is strikingly confirmed in Watkins's inability to perceive that, with some exceptions, his subjects are - if he is any guide to them - of no lasting interest. I add the proviso, since it is clear that Watkins is an unsteady observer of people. Anthony Powell, for example, is certainly an important writer. You would never have guessed the fact, however, from Watkins's marriage to Violet Pakenham, sister of the present Earl of Longford, he writes: "Marriage into this large and talkative family, according to Powell, introduced him to numerous relations". Talkativeness is clearly not contagious, at least when Mr Watkins is around. Nevertheless, the sentence is rather typical of the observations contained in this book: banal, lifeless, a trifle absurd in its inappositeness, and depending for its interest upon the highly accidental connection with a character who, for better or for worse, has got himself a "name" in Fleet Street. We are informed that Lord Bradwell was "basically a tall, thin, dark man", that Michael Foot "was attractive to both men and women" - a phrase which momentarily awakens some interest in this most overrated of Fleet Street's creations, until Watkins adds "in the sense that, having met him, most people liked him and wanted to be in his company".

Therapeutic collection of oddments concerning Sir Ian Gilmour concludes "On the whole, Gilmour was a force for the good", a sentence which might have excused itself had Watkins anywhere told us what he means by "good". As a political journalist, however, he eschews ideas, an ordinance which greatly hampers him when he comes to describe Anthony Crosland, William Robson and G. E. Moore, since to leave out their ideas is to leave out all that is interesting. This unconcern for ideas is not, in my view, balanced by any lively concern for detail, or by any psychological penetration. The figures have a cardboard quality, and the anecdotes that are pinned to them are often extremely inconsequential. Worst of all are the jokes and bon mots, which are chronically anti-climactic. The following are not untypical: "One of the worst things you can say about someone is that he is a good broadcaster" - this from Philip Hope-Wallace, who generously attributed it, we are told, to Harold Nicolson; "only poets drink rose" (Sir John Junor); "I was never an alcoholic, only a bit of a lubber" (Malcolm Muggeridge); "I like good food and wine as much as Roy Jenkins does, but I keep quiet about it" (David Steel).

When Watkins is moved by personal feeling, as in his portraits of his father and of Iain Macleod, he writes well, and with a certain pathos. But the relief is rare, and for anyone who does not know the characters, and who is not persuaded that people important to Fleet Street are, for that reason, important in the world, the mass of the book makes tedious reading. (One is reminded of the time when Paul Johnson changed his mind about socialism, and the media were

swimming from the effects of it; it was as though Marx had become a Christian, or Bach had joined the atonal school. All at once the whole world was supposed to examine its conscience, and answer "right" or "wrong".) The judgments, when they are offered, are astonishingly naive. We are told that Lucky Jim "struck a mighty blow for democracy in the English novel", an observation based on the claim that to treat a lower-class hero without patronage came as a radical departure. It is clearly time for Fleet Street to renew its acquaintance with English literature - starting, perhaps, with *Piers Plowman*. Again, we are told that David Steel "was [the past tense is a persistent affliction] one of the most skilful, determined and creative politicians of the post-war period, although nothing is said about what Steel stands for or why. The judgment illustrates Watkins's parochialism. No foreign politician could be considered in what is essentially a gallery of drinking companions, so that those who might really deserve such praise - de Gaulle, Sadat, Tito, and a few other not necessarily amiable men - are ruled out from the start, while those English politicians who do not regard Fleet Street as the true forum of political transformation, such as Mrs Thatcher, or Mr Benn, are perceived only as figures on a distant horizon, not to be compared with the chaps in the bar. Watkins prizes, as models of political journalism (and they may well be that), some of the archest of Hugh Massingham's trivia, and singles out A. J. P. Taylor as "one of the best writers of English prose of this century" - a judgment which is truly amazing, unless you think that only journalists and popular historians write English prose.

*Brief Lives* is undeniably an interesting document. We are familiar with the Marxist accusation, that the so-called "free press" of the Western world is no more than a carefully conducted system of privilege, designed to raise into prominence those opinions and personalities which are fit for establishment consumption. This book illustrates the falsehood of the charge. The modern political journalist is not interested in any establishment that he does not himself create. He inhabits a kind of aquarium, from which the distorted features of nearby political fauna can be observed, but which maintains life and feeling at a level of tepid banality. Occasionally one or other passer-by enters the swim, and becomes hilariously intimate. For the most part, however, the world of living people remains inaccessible and uninviting. The centre of the aquarium is at El Vino's (frequently mentioned by Watkins); its periphery embraces St Bride's and the Temple Bar. Escorted there, the journalist can be bounded in a wineglass, and yet count himself king of infinite space. Because he monopolizes the political education of millions, he imagines that he has privileged access to the events which govern them. Every fact or personality that captures his attention is regarded as intrinsically interesting; the proof being that it can be converted into short, clear sentences and handed to the printer. Critical judgment and felt observation are not advised - first impressions are enough to disclose the real importance of events; since their importance lies in first impressions.

Journalism consists in retailing first impressions second hand. One should not regret this fact. Journalism is not literature; on the contrary, it depends precisely on suspending the faculties of judgment and observation which literature inculcates. And for this reason, *Brief Lives*, unlike its namesake, will exemplify its name.

## On Depositing the Check for a Legacy

Dinner is over and not much is left.  
Bones that might contribute to a soup.  
Some sticks of celery, and two burnt rats.

Into the icebox with it all. Sweep off  
The crumbs and leave the dishes in the sink.  
Let's open the brandy and play hearts.

Tom Disch

# SOME GOOD REASONS FOR VISITING LES EDITIONS DU SEUIL



## The great bestsellers of 1982

Michel Albert : Le pari français • Marthe • Hervé Bazin : L'église verte • Michel del Castillo : La nuit du décret • Maurice Genevoix : La maison du Mesnil • Henri Guillemin : L'affaire Jésus • Hubert Reeves : Patience dans l'azur .....

## The great authors of the autumn list

Roland Barthes • Aimé Césaire • Driss Chraïbi • Julien Green • Anne Hébert • Michèle Man- ceaux • Élie Wiesel .....

## A place for reflexion and debates

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# Shades of Gatsby

Nicholas von Hoffman

CAROLINE SEEBOHM

The Man Who Was Vogue: The Life and Times of Condé Nast  
390pp. with 47 illustrations.  
Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £12.50.  
0 297 78048 J

WILFRED SHEED

Clare Boothe Luce  
183pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.  
£12.95.  
0 297 78048 4

"A modest Medici, directing a modest art to its finest achievement", is how Caroline Seebom describes Condé Nast in this conscientious and affectionately written biography. The maifest art alluded to is photography, particularly the work of a succession of outstanding men and one woman (Toni Frissell), which was introduced to an upper-class public through the pages of Condé Nast's flagship publication, *Vogue*. The man who owned and published the British, French and American editions of *Vogue*, as well as *House of Garden*, *Glamour* and *Vanity Fair*, summed up by saying, "Here I was, just a boy from St Louis and Edna Chase (Vogue's editor for half a century) a Quaker from New Jersey. Between us we set the standards of the time. We showed America the meaning of style."

Condé Nast dealt in that elusive merchandise called fashion. We know it is important, we know it shapes and gives tone in the lives of even the most dedicated anti-materialists. The minicopics that divide our life-spans into recognizable periods are defined by fashions in clothes, furniture, colour, automobile design, music and courtship, yet fashion is a subject that dissolves under the touch. Deep thinking applied to it nearly always seems silly. Why do hemlines go up? Some say it means that war is coming, so cloth has to be husbanded; others say it is a minor artist's conspiracy to make sure that whatever hangs in one's closet will soon be embarrassingly out of style. In the late 1960s the fashion was no fashion—blue jeans, boots and second-hand army jackets—but in due course no fashion becomes as unfashionable as fashion.

Somewhere in the United States there is an organization called The Color Institute which is reputed to be perfecting that part of the spectrum which will be fashionable in the mid to late 1980s, so that the drapers, the weavers, the paint manufacturers, the plastics people can get together on rudimentary colour coordination. That seems to be the extent of conscious control of the flow of fashion by any centralized institution, so the circle is unsolved. In the America of the 1950s it is impossible to tell if sack dresses, pillbox hats, tail fins and Danish modern furniture made Dwight Eisenhower, the Cold War and the Baby Boom or if they merely reflected them.

Caroline Seebom has no better luck at answering these questions than others who have tried before her. We are left with the life story of a businessman who probably was more important than Arthur Smith of Smith Nut, Screw and Bolt, Inc. but we are not really told why. Seebom credits Nast with having invented café society. "Around 1922," she quotes him, "I got a little money and decided to give a party. I thought, 'My God, I can't give a party. My friends are too mixed up. I can't leave out George Gershwin and I can't leave out Mrs Vanderbilt and I can't have them together.' I did, and to my surprise, everyone liked it."

We can suppose this was quite a coup at the time, but it seems to have had no effect on either Gershwin's art or on the flow of Mrs Vanderbilt's blue blood. Mr. Nast had famously expensive parties at which businessmen, society and the more commercially successful people from the world of art and entertainment drank and danced. He did not conduct a school of painting or design. No thinker met. In his immensely expensive drawing-rooms for the first time to great subsequent effect, Condé

Nast was the Hugh Hefner of his day—or perhaps one should say that Hugh Hefner is the Condé Nast of ours.

This house became the venue for parties and a haven for house guests, particularly visitors from Europe. Harry Yoxall, who used to stay there on visits from London, remembered there was always something faintly amateurish about the running of the household. "None of the luggage turned up in our rooms, I recall. And when we played bridge after dinner, the butler was so eager to clean up ashtrays that you could concentrate on the game. It was as though they had all been hired for the night." Shades of Gatsby, Yoxall felt, Nast's perfectionism competed with his inexperience in such large-scale hospitality. But Sandy Key, as Nast's daughter Natica named the place, was never less than glamorous and in those days when swimming pools were still a rarity, his was one of the highest and grandest anyone had ever seen.

Anyone who has been to Hefner's establishment in either Chicago or Los Angeles would recognize the description.

Like Hefner, Nast's admiration for rather young ladies never waned, never weakened, even in old age. But unlike most of those who have written about Hefner, Seebom is fond of her subject. Her affection for him enables her to show him interesting and not unwinning personality, one that might do well in fiction. But the constraints of non-fiction, plus a talent not given to embroidering human possibilities, keep us from getting close to Nast. When, in his late fifties, he sends away a young, lovely and devoted wife because the stock-market crash has ruined him, we would like to know more about it. He obviously needs her love; she wants to give it. But in order to explain what happened, the author might have had to invent.

Though this is a book about Condé Nast's life and "his times," Ms Seebom's strength is not in the latter. Many famous names are mentioned but the reader is not transported back to the New York of the Teens and the Twenties where Nast flourished. Her style, always clear and always chatty, isn't up to it. To compensate there are amusing anecdotes. One of the best being about the lady whose cremated ashes were mistaken by her degenerate friends for cocaine. Her last resting-place was up their noses.

Wilfred Sheed is the better writer, and his style is capable of transporting one anywhere, but his book is less readable than Caroline Seebom's. His subject, Clare Boothe Luce, worked for Condé Nast as editor of his least successful magazine, *Vanity Fair*, now, incidentally, about to be revived by the corporation which has fallen heir to all the old Nast properties.

In the summer of 1949, Sheed was invited to spend the holidays with Mrs Luce on her Connecticut estate. He passed a pleasant time, met famous people at Henry Luce's dining-table and was sweetly treated by his hostess, so that this volume might be regarded as a very long overdue bread-and-butter letter—thank-you note lost for thirty years in the mail. Although some passages seem to be stylized transcriptions of Sheed's recent conversations with his subject, you can't call it an "exposed" book. Even Mrs Luce, who has seldom been taxed with having too low an opinion of herself, would not suggest she is the prototype of modern American women as Sheed does. "Clare's career is a guidebook to what a woman without inherited means thought she had to do to get ahead in this American century," he tells us. Which is true, enough if getting ahead means getting rich, mostly by marrying millionaires.

Lacking footnotes, research or any of the impedimenta signalling serious intent, this book cannot be thought of as a biography; rather, it is an affectionate defence of a wasted talent. At one time Clare Boothe was a promising playwright and journalist. However, her last work of note or merit (by her knight-defender's own estimation) was published over forty years ago. Good as she was, her big hit, *The Woman*, didn't make a permanent reputation for her. From 1940 on, she is of interest only as a politician, but

her political career was short and marginal. She served two terms as a Congresswoman in the early 1940s, establishing a reputation for herself as a harsh, Roosevelt-hating reactionary. In the 1950s she was the American ambassador to Italy, but this appointment was Eisenhower's pay-off to her husband, Henry Luce, for using the power of Time-Life, Inc to put Luce in the White House. As a diplomat she did no better and no worse than many other campaign contributors who have been rewarded with a free tenancy in an ambassadorial mansion. On the whole, though, Mrs Luce has done little during the past forty years but be rich, so that writing nearly 200 pages of encomiastic prose about a beautiful and gifted might-have-been tests Sheed's not inconsiderable abilities.

He succeeds in rescuing her from the suspicion that she is who she is only because of her two rich husbands, and the section of *Clare Boothe Luce* devoted to arguing that Mrs Luce is rich, but not that rich, is persuasive, though not very important. That is little enough to say on behalf of a woman who did one a kindness, but Sheed has too much to say which is inaccurate or misleading. Thank-you notes are one thing, but accepting Clare Boothe Luce's unsupported words about her and Franklin Roosevelt and politics cannot be excused by giving the obligations of a house guest. Sheed apparently believes her assertion that it was one of her "gang, she forgets which, [that] did indeed coin the phrase 'New Deal,' thinking little of it". The authors of the New Deal speech have been traced by a number of historians and they do not include her "gang", which was composed of men like the stockjobber Bernard Baruch, her friend at the time, and Walter Lippmann; people who were politically opposed to and contemptuous of FDR.

"Make no mistake, it was fascism," she says of the first one hundred days of the New Deal. Yes, yes, but in June of 1932, just after FDR's nomination, *Vanity Fair*, where she was managing editor, printed an article by Jay Franklin, a friend Sheed writes, who "influenced" her. The article was called, "Wanted: a Dictator!" It read, "Representative government has collapsed before the clamor of special interests. The American people can give no mandate before November, and the situation is critical. We must declare an immediate truce on party politics and create, legally or illegally, an emergency organization if the executive power is to rescue the national finances and the hands of a lobby-ridden Congress. The alternative is chaos." This piece was signed "The Editors". In preparing her book on Nast, Caroline Seebom asked Mrs Luce about this editorial and was told that she had refused to sign it, that she had even threatened to resign over it. No third party evidence supporting this version of events exists, but we do know that this was precisely the period when men like Baruch were attracted to Mussolini and after Roosevelt's election, were to urge fascism on him as a model.

By the end of the 1930s, Mrs Luce had won herself a reputation as a pathological Roosevelt hater. While FDR was alive it was not he but rather Clare Boothe Luce who was thought of as having the fascist inclinations, a person close to the people who accused Roosevelt of having set up Pearl Harbor in order to involve America in the Second World War. As Sheed writes,

Clare also maintained that FDR had "led us into war," making him the sole culprit. She now says she would like to apologize to Roosevelt, because living was clearly the only way to get us there. But for all her complaints about being misunderstood, she must have known which part of the sentence

contained the dynamite. She was calling Roosevelt a warmonger at a time when people were delirious about his war.

It was not "his war," as Sheed calls it, and his use of this phrase illustrates one of the problems with his book. He has not provided adequate background to the history of the period in which Mrs Luce was most active. Nevertheless, he has some sense of bow he contemporaries judged her, for he writes that, "giving at Roosevelt brought her not only enemies but friends; in this case, a feeling, rancorous gallery, along with a few sensibiles, which attached itself to Clare in the forties and has never really let go. They are a dismally easy crowd to play to, roaring at everything halfway nasty, whatever its quality. But an audience is an audience and a trouper must work."

Trouper Clare was looking a little like Storm Trooper Clare by the end of her political career. To show that she really is a more balanced person, Sheed discusses her connection with William Buckley and his *National Review*, a publication with approximately the same political perspectives as the Argentine Junta. It is at Buckley's place that Mrs Luce fits in.

There is a J. K. Galbraith and a Milton Friedman may be heard discussing ski slopes or whatever, while outside the Archie Bunkers or foot soldiers of bigotry slug it out over doctrine. The top people have no need to shout; they leave that to the servants.

It is amazing how many public matters from debate to business can be nonideologically discussed if they have to be, ie by people who have to do something about them.

But even this depoliticized snobbery cannot give Sheed's heroine the look of someone other than a rich old woman grumbling about the payment of taxes.

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It is amazing how many public matters from debate



# Crypto-Christian with a pipe

Douglas Johnson

JEAN FABRE

Maigret: Enquête sur un enquêteur  
307pp. Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 58Fr.

When the late Rupert Davies was being considered for the role of Inspector Maigret in the BBC television series, part of the auditioning process was a series of interviews with Maigret's creator, Georges Simenon. As the story was told by Davies, at a certain moment, without thinking, he rose from his chair, went over to the window and looked down at the street below. This gesture convinced Simenon: it was Maigret. Whether in his office, Quai des Orfèvres, or at home, Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, the window was important for him. "Maigret était debout devant la fenêtre ouverte, pipe à la bouche, mains dans les poches, dans une pose qui lui était familière".

The story confirms what many people have always believed, that Maigret is a very real and special character for Simenon. Although Simenon has, from time to time, expressed boredom and impatience with him, as he has with the whole process of novel writing, he has returned more than once to "mon ami Maigret". In three cycles, from 1929 to 1933, from 1938 to 1941, and then from 1945 to 1973, he published more than a hundred novels and short stories revolving around the famous commissaire, which suggests a deep affinity between author and hero. This has to be considered along with Simenon's constant penchant for autobiographical writings in a variety of forms, and there is no reason to think that this element is absent from the "romans-Maigret" when it is notably present in the other "romans-romans" (what Simenon calls the "romans-durs"). Simenon claims, in his *livre-somme*, the *Mémoires d'un romancier* (published in 1981), that his life is significant but that his fiction is not ("J'oublie mes romans strictement écrits"), but one might be well advised not to take this comment too seriously; we are undoubtedly dealing with someone whose creative talents are linked to his personal experiences and preoccupations.

Simenon himself has hardly shrunk from the assimilation of himself to his character, since he has allowed a successful paperback edition of the Maigret novels to carry the mark of Maigret, in the form of a pipe, along with a photograph of the author smoking a large pipe. Simenon's father died at the age of forty-four, as did Maigret's, and both fathers were twenty-four when their sons were born. Maigret's father (who had the unusual name of Eynrate, a name which also exists in Simenon's Belgian family) was the *régisseur* of a château near Moulins, while Simenon himself worked for the *régisseur* of a château in the same part of France. Maigret was a medical student until obliged to abandon his studies when his uncle died, while Simenon, who knew medical students when they lodged in the parental home, has always had an interest in and a nostalgia for the doctor's profession. As every reader of the Maigret novels knows, the commissaire is haunted by memories of the smells and images of his childhood, and exactly the same preoccupation is shown by Simenon in his many autobiographical writings, interviews and diaries. It probably takes a devotee to point to other similarities. Maigret, feeling a certain satisfaction when he stands on the *servant's* side of the bed (in *Maigret et le corps sans tête*), or in particular excitement when he finds himself virtually running a restaurant (in *Maigret et son mort*) recalls Simenon's mother, who always wanted him to become a shopkeeper. We know that Simenon's own tastes in food, "les plats populaires" were "imposés à mon bon Maigret", and Maigret's childhood fear of eating a four-pound loaf before dinner (*Les Mémoires de Maigret*) recalls Simenon's own story of how he ate twelve croissants with his morning coffee, to the disbelief of the *étirateur*.

Yet Simenon has stated categorically that he does not identify himself with

Maigret: "Je n'ai jamais imaginé que je ressemblais à Maigret". And Jean Fabre, in his careful study, has now introduced a different way in which to link at the relationship between the two. The "romans-Maigret" are, it seems, about the process of novel writing. Certain of them begin with a description of white light. This, according to Fabre, represents the white paper which faces the writer as he begins work (in *Quand j'étais vieux*, Simenon comments on his early fascination with white paper). Sometimes the novel begins with Maigret writing a report, or rounding off the details of a case which has been concluded: this one affair, like the previous novel, has ended, a new affair, like the new novel, is about to begin. At a certain point in the novel Maigret is uneasy, nervous, bodiless, he cannot see how he will find a solution in his problems; the author of the novel has the same experience as he wonders how his book will develop and hesitates over the different possibilities with which he is confronted. Maigret, like the novelist, tries intuitively to enter into the personae of the characters with whom he has to deal; he seeks to assemble and to co-ordinate the image he is presented with. Like the narrator of a novel, he is the originator of action, the source of knowledge and understanding. Madame Maigret, like the wife of the novelist, is obliged to share these moments of doubt and anguish, just as she can also participate in the relief which accompanies the successful ending of an *enquête*, or the conclusion of a novel. As Simenon once explained to Roger Stéphane, "il n'y a rien qui ressemble à un roman comme une enquête policière".

This complex game with mirrors became most acute in 1951, with the publication of *Les Mémoires de Maigret*, when we are presented with the Maigret novels and completing the texts with additional information about his life and activities. The archness of Simenon's procedure is only equalled by Glide, who in *Les Faux Monnayeurs* wrote a novel about a man who kept a journal while Glide himself kept *Le Journal des Faux Monnayeurs* about the writing of his novel. According to Simenon, Glide was the one man with whom he has ever kept up a long correspondence.

It was necessary for this dimension to be added to the "romans-Maigret" because simply as detective novels they leave a lot to be desired. It is usually accepted that a detective novel should be an exercise in rationalism, and the task of the detective is to unravel a mystery by reasoning and identify the criminal. This process is not at all prominent in the Maigret novels. The game whereby suspicion is deliberately thrown upon one character after another, so that the reader is bemused until he is confronted with a final revelation is largely absent. Maigret makes no claim to be a rationalist, "Je ne pense jamais" and "je ne crois rien" are his customary responses to enquiries about what he thinks. He expresses his contempt for the intellectual crime and he is always presented as the reflective but passive observer, turning things over and over "dans sa lourde tête" (*Le Châtrier de Providence*), and "waiting expectantly for things to sort themselves out. So much so that Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie has suggested that the historian could take Maigret as a model, and confine his role to that of an observer and a listener. It is true that on occasions Maigret takes notes and the reader joins him in consulting them (as in *Le Chien Jaune*). Once when on leave from the Quai des Orfèvres, and when the enquiry is being conducted by Inspector Janvier, his subordinate, Maigret follows the unravelling of the crime as a member of the public and the reader shares his self-questioning and his puzzlement (*Maigret s'amuse*).

But the normal reader of the detective novel must be disappointed. The unmasking of the murderer is, sometimes so simple as to be enigmatic, as when a parasite (the *le*) applied to an old servant and his clear

that she has shot her employer (*Maigret et les Vieillards*, a novel which Simenon thought one of his finest), or when a witness emerges from nowhere in order freely to provide the vital evidence (*Monsieur Gallot décadé*). Sometimes the murderer is a shadowy, unknown figure who is introduced just in time to be identified (*Maigret aux Assises*) or the long arm of coincidence is yanked right out of its socket, as when, at the very beginning of a case, Maigret decides to go into a particular café which turns out to be the hub of the whole affair (*Maigret et le corps sans tête*).

One therefore has to explain why the Maigret stories have been so successful, given that they do not follow the normal rules of the detective novel. Fabre has analysed the phenomenon and he considers the

sympathetic towards "les petites gens" (in Simenon's own words, "ce que je ne peux pas appeler autrement que des petites gens").

But it is not always so simple. *La Première Enquête de Maigret* shows him abandoning the cause of justice and allowing a rich family to go unpunished, accepting in return the successful furtherance of his own career. *Maigret aux Assises* shows him allowing the man who has just been acquitted of murder to find and kill the real murderer. In this case Maigret is installed in his office in the Quai des Orfèvres, controlling the movements of several characters by telephone, and it is remarkable that although one of his more obscure detectives, Neveu, has established that the central figure has acquired a revolver, Maigret does not tell this to

his favourite assistant, young Lapointe, who is therefore in danger. At the end it is as if Maigret were relieved that everything has happened outside his jurisdiction. Thus a sort of natural justice is accomplished, accompanied by an ambiguous moral judgment and a disavowal of responsibility.

We cannot simply say that Maigret is a good man and does good things. His loyalties are mixed. Fabre explains these ambiguities by flourishing, rather than fingering, the beads of his socio-critical rosary. Maigret, he tells us, is a phenomenon of a changing France. He is a policeman who has learned his *métier* pacing the streets of Paris, and who becomes ill at ease as he encounters a host of people who have no experience of such sordid realities but owe their positions to their ability to pass examinations and to their membership of an *aristocratie*.

*Maigret et le voleur élégant* shows this clearly. But Maigret the artisan, the man of humble origins who might have become a doctor, the son of a *régisseur* (a profession necessarily situated between different social classes), the isolated investigator who carries on his gigantic shoulders the responsibility for countless hatreds and crimes, is not always certain what he should do. "Ce qu'il est impossible, c'est de juger", comments one character, thereby earning Maigret's approval and thanks (*Maigret et le clochard*). It is this which provides such tension and suspense as is present in the "romans-Maigret" and which other detective writers achieve by more ordinary means.

The essence of these novels is the confrontation between Maigret and some closed, unknown, often hostile milieu. Within this milieu there are sometimes barriers of incomprehension among its component parts, "deux mondes qui s'affrontent", as it is described (*Maigret s'amuse*). The task of Maigret is to penetrate these worlds, and this is explicitly described in a rather unsuccessful novel, *Maigret et l'affaire Nocturne*. Here Maigret has to deal with witnesses who are either deliberately silent or who cannot speak French. Some of them are from different communities: they do not always understand, or like each other. The milieu is that of professional gambling, which Maigret does not know; in addition he is forced to realise, once when he has stayed late with his friends, the Pardaons, that after his departure the good doctor has to work on into the small hours of the morning, just as he also discovers, to his surprise, that Lapointe has been secretly teaching himself English. The fact that

Paris is covered in snow and that any form of walking is almost impossible, is the final touch in a novel in which Maigret is totally unable to understand what is going on.

As Maigret struggles with that which he is not familiar with — aristocrats, doctors, wealthy families, bourgeois, diplomats, unknown countries or unknown areas of Paris — he is seeking to know or to discover so much as to understand. He is not so much an instrument of the law, investigating crimes which terrify or horrify (Jean Paulhan pointed out that there is no sense of tragedy in these novels), as a man able to indulge his curiosity. He compares his role to that of the psychologist, or doctor, or biographer, complaining only that the detective is expected to do things more quickly. One of his favourite games is to sit in a café and watch his neighbour, to guess what his next gesture will be. When faced by a suspect, his first thought is to reflect, for example, that there is a man who can't often laugh out loud.

Observing another character, he wonders why she continues to hide the fact that she drinks when she has otherwise given up all pretence. He sees two men playing dominoes. Do they play at the same time every day? When did they start the habit? He watches a cat approach a stove and start away in surprise when it discovers that the stove is cold. Maigret absorbs experience, he does not simply search for clues.

For many readers, the Maigret novels have the great merit of displaying France and the French. With the *commissaire* we discover not only the geography of Paris, small provincial towns in all their melancholy and the isolated communities that live around harbours, canals and châteaux, but also what exists behind "la visage banal" normally presented to outsiders. The *valets de chambre* who marry cooks and who come to Paris and take over cafés, the man whose Protestant upbringing in Nîmes prevents him from saying *tu* to people, the inspectorate which seems to be made up of men from the Massif Central, the youth who has "une bonne chaire drue de jeune paysan à qui Paris n'avait pas encore pris sa santé", all these are part of the display of France. It is not surprising that Maigret should come from a village near Moulins, the centre of the hexagon, or that he should have an endless interest in the variety of his country. As he tastes a wine he tries to place it, it has "un parfum de terroir", and since it comes from the region of Poitiers he is soon bound to recognize its "arrière-goût de pierre à fusil".

The fact that this is a stereotyped vision of France makes it all the more real, and probably explains why it is that Maigret has not become the plaything of his fans. The devotees of Sherlock Holmes may discuss the colour of his dressing-gown, whether he was educated at Oxford or Cambridge, or the whereabouts of his best-keeping retreat in Sussex. No one (least of all the Magdunoi) discusses Maigret's retirement to Meung-sur-Loire, or whether he chose that town because it had a connection with Janvair (there are four Janvairs listed on the 1914-1918 war memorial there). The reality of Maigret is a French reality rather than an individual one. Viewers of the BBC series did not discuss whether Madame Maigret was portrayed as being too slim or Inspector Lucas as too tall, they wondered whether Maigret, as a Frenchman, would kiss his wife on the mouth when he returned home from work, or whether French matches would in fact light when struck against a wall, as Rupert Davies (possibly using English matches?) demonstrated at the beginning of each programme.

The France of Jules Maigret is attractive also because it is the past. Maigret would have disliked railway stations which are dependent upon computers; he would have been at a loss when confronted by blocks of flats without a *concierge*; he would have been ill at ease in cafés dominated by cassette music and electronic games; he would have despised *le Nouvelle cuisine*. It is understandable that it is nearly ten years since last he appeared in a new story.

Part of a stamp which the Republic of Nicaragua issued to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Interpol in 1972.



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Christopher Lawrence

LESTER S. KING

*Medical Thinking: A Historical Preface*  
336pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press. £13.80.  
0 691 08397 9

In 1979, in a book called *The Medusa and the Snake*, Lewis Thomas, a physician, examined "Medical lessons from history". Thomas's conclusions were routinely Whiggish. The medical past was a farrago of guesswork, empiricism, weird imaginings and even weirder happenings. Doctors for the most part did little more than inflict frivolous and irresponsible treatment on the innocent sick. The only surprising thing about all this was that the profession was able to get away with it for so long. Sometime in the 1830s, Thomas concluded, it was discovered that the greater part of medicine was nonsense. "This in my view," says Lester King in *Medical Thinking*, "is an absolute misreading of history". Now, were it the case that King's objection was only to the supercilious and unsympathetic tone of Thomas's account he might find few to disagree, or at least outside medicine. King however recoils at something more than Thomas's dismissive posture. Such a vision, he complains, distorts the equestrian flow of things medical, it sees dark lines in the continuous historical landscape. Uniformitarianism should be the historian's method and Thomas has been guided by catastrophism. King therefore has written a book to set matters right.

King agrees of course that things do change in medicine. Theories, for example, come and go. The black bile of Galen, the pneuma of van Helmont or the immunoglobulins of modern science are all rather different conceptually. Not only theories, but also methods may alter in medicine. In the Ancient World the philosophies of the dogmatist and the empiricist spawned their corresponding medical sects. In the eighteenth century John Wesley eschewed theory, at least in medicine, whilst physicians, in King's words, chased "an airy insubstantial quality, called hypothesis".

But beneath this phantasmagoria of early medical life, behind the leech, the surgeon's knife, the ague, the palsy and the pox, King has sighted firm ground: "the essential unity of medical thinking throughout the centuries". What always remains, he says, are the problems, the timeless medical questions. "What is the disease from which the patient suffers? How can we identify it? What can we do for it?" Along with these are other questions about cause, prevention or the ethics of the bedside. In *Medical Thinking* King takes examples of such dilemmas from different eras and aims to expose their essential identity.

It should hardly come as a surprise to anyone unfamiliar with scholarship in the history of medicine, to learn that, in its earlier work, King has shown his greatest sympathy for the eighteenth century. It is not surprising because he shares his view of culture and its changes with the historians of the Enlightenment. Beneath all custom, tradition, fashion, historical epochs and social diversities both he and they discover immutable human situations. King's doctors are like the characters in Johnson's Shakespeare, not modified "by the accidents of opinions". There is more than a little paradox here. King himself has not been above correcting Enlightenment physicians for trying to build comprehensive and systematic doctrines to embrace all known medical data. This seems to be the aim of his present book. But is it possible in the face of historical diversity to find a general medicine over and above particular ones?

Take for instance the question of diagnosis, which, writes King, "is central to the practice of medicine for the patient suffers". In a masterly essay published in 1931, and called "Etiological diagnosis", Ludwig Edelstein considered the clinical world of the Greek physician. He suggested that the overriding concern of this

craftsman was with prediction, not only of the future course of the illness, but of other relevant events in the patient's life. Diagnosis was but a limited aspect of this greater skill and merely meant determining what was actually happening at the moment in question. The significance of prognosis, moreover, lay not simply in its relation to the physician's physical management of the sickness, but in its psychological power. It was central to the work of the practitioner, who needed to impress his skill on both the patient and the audience gathered in his workshop.

Never again, perhaps, was the ability to prognosticate quite so exalted

as it was in the ancient world. Disease, he is saying, is finally a moral category and, though he might repudiate the corollary, diagnosis must therefore be a system of social classification. King, unwittingly, seems to support the radical suggestion that diagnosis has become central to medicine today because medical knowledge is now a system of social control.

King, I think, would reject this conclusion drawn from his own premises, for though he recognizes a social component in disease definition he also distinguishes an unconstructed element, the "pure clinical entity". He cites as an example the Stokes-Adams attack, a clinical episode characterized

by disorders with the sign of Socrates. The result, of course, was that the patient was repudiated, and the disease, conversely any clinical entity, was venerable. King's argument is another "thought style" for the venerable diseases to be distinguished from the different clinical entities from the Fleck the timeless clinical entity was very much time-related.

By ignoring context, then, King appropriates the past to the present and insists on the continuity of the medical confrontation. To do this he regards the highly theoretical language of the past as though it were a description equally applicable to present situations. Richard Morton was a seventeenth-century physician who wrote a treatise on consumption called *Phthisiologia*. Modern pathologists describe one of the characteristic features of this disease post-mortem as the tubercle. The central portions of the lungs ordinarily become necrotic and when the lesions are large the necrotic material is coughed up. With these gross findings, says King, "Morton is familiar". But what Morton actually says is "that a crude Tubercle Swelling is bred from the obstruction of some glandular part of the Lungs, wit, when a greater quantity of Serum or Water is separated from the Blood, and so likewise the Humour that is shut up not being any more renewed by an influx of fresh Humour does by degrees grow hard and dry from the natural Heat of the part". It is this latter event which King identifies with necrosis. But necrosis is not a new descriptive term at all but the product of nineteenth-century pathological theory and has implicit within it ideas of cell death. Morton could not describe necrosis in tubercles in the lung because it implies a concept of life he could not have held. King's empirical account can no more follow its own "thought style", cell theory, than Morton can describe his post-mortem findings in phthisis in anything other than humoral terms. In his attempt to retrieve the past and attack the hubris of authors like Thomas, who see all earlier medicine as a mistake generated by Irrationality, King has over too far backwards. He assumes that because doctors in the past were rational their notions and descriptions have some ultimate meaning which is the same as ours.

To defend the rationality of the past against naive scientism need not mean showing it to be like the present. Anglo-American historians of medicine have, in recent years, become aware of the relevance of their work of the views of the French disciples of Gaston Bachelard, notably Georges Canguilhem and Michel Foucault. Briefly, the challenge offered by these authors has been to present a very sophisticated theory of intellectual discontinuity. Timeless clinical experience they replace with the conception that physicians in the nineteenth century redefined life, function, disease and death in terms of a wholly new bedside perception. Perhaps for Claude Bernard writing in the 1840s, all former medicine is just nonsense was non-sense. King must not reference to these writers so self-evident does continuity seem to him.

Not that he needed to plunge into such recondite waters to discover another fierce but rather different attack on the Enlightenment perspective. Clifford Geertz's essay has had much to say to this regard to the persistence of a universalist outlook in anthropology, for example, in the fruitless search for the characteristic forms of religious life and experience. To medicine such a search is carried on by those who believe in a medical world over and above the real historical world in which people live. In this Platonic realm diagnosis, disease, life and death have essential meanings which can be teased out of the contingent historical settings regardless of whether the doctor were a toga, a wig, or a top-hat. But meaning is only given to these terms by the way they are used in real historical situations. Diagnosis as understood by the Greek physician and the consultant cardiologist share, at most, a couple of similarities: what the real meaning of diagnosis is what these doctors are doing in their own culture.



"The Muscles", an engraving from De humani corporis fabrica libri septem by Vesalius. It is included in A Catalogue of Sixteenth Century Medical Books in Edinburgh Libraries (298pp. Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. £45. 0 85405 039 6) compiled by D. T. Bird.

In medicine. In the eighteenth century an Edinburgh professor lectured to his students on the case of a poor and sick man who was recovered as being a case of "weak stomach" and, though year 1740 and has never been well since; sometime after that he was obliged to work very hard and to be in a role here seems to be the task of explaining the meaning of the patient's illness. The diagnostic category "weak stomach" after all hardly indicates the need for recondite pathological knowledge. The experienced eighteenth-century practitioner had to know how to relate symptoms to a wider interpenetration, to show how cold and how the stagnation of the natural economy produced gaol fever.

Though always an aspect of practice, diagnosis has only achieved its present prominence within the past two hundred years. The dictum of Lord Horder—that the most important thing in medicine is diagnosis, the second most important thing is diagnosis and the third most important thing is diagnosis—is not timeless, but where then does modern medicine's preoccupation with diagnosis arise? The answer is, of course, the grounds for calling a condition a disease rests ultimately on the values of

## Noel Coward: for . . .

Nicholas Shrimpton

JOHN LAHR

Coward the Playwright  
179pp. Methuen. £7.95 (paperback).  
£3.95.  
0413 468402

Noel Coward was no player not a gentleman, and he never forgot it. Others might succumb to the impression of aristocratic hauteur which he sustained so convincingly for more than half a century. He himself was not deceived. Almost entirely without formal education, on stage in a series of third-rate plays from the tender age of ten, and suburban in both upbringing and outlook, his success as a literary artist was a triumph of Cheeky wit and grit over grimly adverse circumstances.

Not the least of those adverse circumstances was the startling rapidity with which he became rich and famous. When *I'll Leave It To You* opened in the West End in 1920, with its author in the leading role, Coward's father had to sign the contract for him—Noel himself had not yet legally come of age. By 1923 he had acquired his own fans. The Ralls Royce arrived at 26, the first biography at 33. Only an embarrassing income tax offence in 1941 saved him from premature canonization as a theatrical knight before he was decently middle-aged. Success of this kind is good for the ego but bad for the judgment. Coward the public personality was famously fastidious. Coward the writer was equipped with tremendous technique but execrable taste.

It is this which explains the peculiar pattern of his literary career. Most writers can be seen developing or declining as their work proceeds. Coward's output, by contrast, is an extraordinary hotchpotch of the good, the bad and the indifferent. One of his masterpieces, *Hay Fever*, is written almost before he has properly started, in 1924. Another, *Private Lives*, seems oddly isolated in 1929, saprophytic from its great precursor by such indifferent terms as *Smash-Mouth*, *The Marquise*, *Howe Chat* and *Blithe Spirit* (for which the Stewarts never forgave him) or in a playlet like *Hands Across The Sea* (which rattled the Mountbattens). Coward is a satirist. In his major plays his purposes are very different. He made his attitude to the social world of those plays, the upper-class life of the 1920s and 30s, very plain in his second volume of autobiography, *Future Indefinite*.

I cannot agree with contemporary social commentators that they were so appallingly decadent, and degraded. It is true that there was a certain flush discernable on the face of High Society—High Society in the Long Island, Paris, Riviera sense—but on the whole those poor maligned years were not nearly so bad as they are now made out to have been. There were worse things going on in the twenties and thirties than casual amorality in the South.

By 1933 he had accurately enlarged the list to what will probably remain his canon. "I had," he declared, "written several important plays—*Hay Fever*, *Private Lives*, *Design for Living*, *Present Laughter* and *Blithe Spirit*." In the heat of creation, however, such fine discriminations entirely escaped him and two-thirds of his work went wildly awry.

The symptoms of this high rate of failure are easy to identify. Chief among them must, I suppose, be sentimentality, a note which is remorselessly sustained from the maternal melodrama of *The Vortex* to the mawkishness of *Waiting for the Wings*. When Max Baerbohm caricatured Coward and the original cast of *Blithe Spirit*, it was this that he identified as the keynote of his comedy. But as Max had himself observed, twenty years earlier, "Who can be long in England without becoming sentimental?" As our most English (that is, least Irish) great writer of high comedy, it was only too easy to see that Coward would suffer from the vice. The theatre in which he grew up did nothing to diminish the tendency. "Theatrical people," Coward remarks in the first volume of his autobiography, "are notoriously prone to emotion, and frequently victimised by their own foolish sentimentality." Coward fell victim

again and again, often devoting extraordinary craftsmanship and style to the music of the damp hunk.

Occasionally, it must be said, the muse returned the compliment, most notably at that moment in the balcony scene of *Private Lives* when Coward's comic purposes require him to encapsulate a convincing coup de foudre in less than twenty lines:

You're looking very lovely you know, in this damned moonlight. Your skin is clear and cool, and your eyes are shining, and you're growing lovelier every second as I look at you. You don't hold any mystery for me, darling, do you mind? There isn't a particle of you that I don't know, remember, and want.

Only a writer who'd been wasting his talents for five years turning out *Blithe Spirit* and *The Marquise* could have trusted the tear-ducts quite so swiftly, and thus maintained the momentum on which his comedy relies.

Reciprocal effects of this kind are rare, however. More normally sentimentality needs to be overcome or suppressed. The best antidote is detachment and in the four or five plays which continue to matter this is just what Coward achieves. "Just" is the appropriate word because it is so easy to exaggerate the effect involved into hostility or satire. Kenneth Tynan fell into this trap in the eloquent "Tribute to Mr Coward" which he published in 1953:

He began, like many other satirists (Evelyn Waugh, for instance), by rebelling against conformity, and ended up making his peace with it, even becoming its outspoken advocate.

Certainly the Coward of the 1950s lost his sense of detachment. Whether that attitude had ever amounted to satire, however, is another matter. In so far as *The Vortex* is a social rather than psychological play (which isn't very far), and in the comic problem play *Easy Virtue* (frankly copied from Pinero and subsequently repudiated), Coward is a satirist. In *Howe Chat* and *Blithe Spirit* (for which the Stewarts never forgave him) or in a playlet like *Hands Across The Sea* (which rattled the Mountbattens) Coward is a satirist. But in his major plays his purposes are very different. He made his attitude to the social world of those plays, the upper-class life of the 1920s and 30s, very plain in his second volume of autobiography, *Future Indefinite*.

Though there are some better points here than the flashy prose style might lead one to expect, the book still seems to me to miss the heart of Coward's achievement (in the end, indeed, it is driven back on to the conventional praise of him as an all-round "phenomenon"). If that achievement is not an expression of homosexual or bisexual sexuality (but fails), and *Blithe Spirit* "acts out Coward's fantasy of homosexual torment and triumph".

The answer, in my view, begins to emerge when one asks what values the major plays articulate. Discussion of this question conventionally begins and ends with Amanda's observation in *Private Lives* that life is being kind to everyone, and giving money to old beggar women, and being as gay as possible. "It is a catchy motto. But it is also, unfortunately, a deeply misleading summary of the implications of Coward's work."

In being kind to everyone and giving money to old beggar women, the heroes and heroines of his plays, on the other hand, from the dissipated Blisses of *Hay Fever* to the cynical Charles Condomine in *Blithe Spirit*, all demonstrate the supreme importance of pursuing one's own pleasure to the top of one's bent and not giving a rap for anyone else in the process. Since this makes Coward sound like an immoralist, it is important to state the principle in whose name such behaviour is advocated. At times it expresses itself as wit or satire, knowledge or art. But fundamentally the value involved is vitality. Take *Hay Fever*, for example, where the theme is

obliged to practise reserve and deceit, to stand aside from the conventional. More simply still, the mainstaying of all the great plays is heterosexual adultery—a topic which Coward was able to regard with disinterested curiosity.

Just as important, however, is that humble suburban background which seems so to restrict Coward's intellectual scope. The darling of the cocktail set had his roots in Clapham and Sutton. Elegantly though he sported his evening dress on grand occasions, he never quite lost the sense of being present as a member of the band. Coward threw himself into the life of the English upper class with enthusiasm, but he did so with his eyes open. His political judgment was never subtle, being chiefly based on the popular patriotism of his Edwardian childhood. But there were no signs here of fashionable flirtation with fascism or with Stalin. When, in 1945, their own names turned up on a Nazi death-list, Rebecca West called Coward: "My dear—the people we should have been seen dead with." The grisly accolade was by no means undeserved.

Sentimentality and snobbery are two of the great faults charged to Coward's work. The major plays, it seems to me, avoid them very deftly. But when we come to the third main accusation, detachment is no longer a sufficient defence. Are Coward's plays, even the best of them, not trivial, empty, slight? What purpose does his disengaged observation serve? Is there anything here which justifies his own suggestion that some of them will "go into the history of comedy like a play by Congreve or Wilde?"

John Laehr's brisk survey of Coward the playwright offers a number of answers to this fundamental question. Echoing Ivor Brown, he argues at one point that the plays express "the metaphysical exhaustion behind the twenties bling", and do so even in their form:

Unlike their plot-heavy antecedents, Coward's characters live comparatively plotless lives. Although Coward's comedies are well-made, the life they depict has lost its thrust-line.

Elsewhere he goes beyond this general suggestion of moral void to more specific interpretation. *Hay Fever* is a discussion of role-playing. *Present Laughter* a guilty account of charm. *Private Lives* embodies the sense of metaphysical exhaustion. *Design for Living* confronts the issues of success and abnormal sexuality (but fails), and *Blithe Spirit* "acts out Coward's fantasy of homosexual torment and triumph".

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# ... and against

David Hare

GRAHAM PAYNE AND SHERIDAN MORLEY (Editors)

The Noel Coward Diaries  
699pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £15.  
0 297 781421

Noel Coward started keeping a diary in 1941 and stopped at the end of 1969. What he wrote has been collected and edited by Graham Payne and Sheridan Morley. I admire their industry, while sometimes doubting the accuracy of their facts. If, as they claim, Benjamin Britten was born in 1930, then Peter Grimes is a short-trousered work of genius.

The diaries record a life largely given over to the theatre and the company of friends. Much time is spent sacking name upon name. These were years in which Coward's reputation slumped and then rose as he discovered his great gift as a cabaret singer, and as his earlier works were revived. Though his fortunes changed, his opinions remained fixed - for the retention of the death penalty, against the prosecution of homosexuals, in favour of the monarchy and the Conservative Party. His political insights are not great. "I am fairly certain that history will vindicate him [Anthony Eden] completely." Through his worst contempt is directed against journalists, his own mind is journalistic, taking things at face value.

The editors admit only to minor censorship, but it is hard to believe that any was necessary, for the effect of the diaries is not at all intimate. Coward was clearly writing for eventual publication, and in a style which aims to give nothing away. He is not interested in describing people or events, concentrating instead to concentrate on his own variations of feeling. His reaction to most people is to spray them with adjectives like "Marvellous", "beautiful", "darling", "wonderful" goes the gun, smothering sense. Anyone, however complex or interesting, gets indiscriminately coated in these words, or, as likely, in their opposites. He seems entirely without real curiosity about people. Nothing ever puzzles or discomforts him, nothing gives him pause, for he long ago decided he believes in something called "human nature" which apparently explains everything. This lumpy belief allows him to take a confident breadth of generalization: "Ah me! The Indians. God bless them. What silly cunts they make of themselves."

Coward himself claims a happy and equable temperament. Large parts of the diaries are concerned with the failure of the marriage of Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier, yet he seems to be imaginatively incapable of

understanding their problems. Every encounter with them is reduced to a stale chant of "Poor Vivien!" or "Poor Larry!" He finds it noticeably difficult to understand other peoples' suffering because in his own life he is so sure that horse-sense is always enough. The result in him, both as a man and a writer, is a disfiguring vein of bitterness, which seems to come from a feeling of being excluded, as if the darker and more disturbing side of life were something which was closed to him. He resents in other people an essence of access to profounder feelings which he cannot share. Generous always to anyone light-hearted, he attacks any writer who brings him bad news: Arthur Miller is "boring and embarrassing"; Tennessee Greene "tedious, pretentious... most unpleasant"; Tennessee Williams "intolerant". Claiming, in his attacks on other writers that he dislikes is "dread" intellectualism, what he actually seems afraid of is thought.

Stuffed full of Professor Niehns's

bull-glands, Coward cannot see that life is not simple. How else to explain his extraordinary confidence, his repeated assurance that he understands the world? Robert Ardrey arrives as the owner of "the most extraordinary brain I have ever encountered", and Coward so admires his book *Thunder Rock* that he is able to claim that "the book disposes of Freud, Marx and organized, or indeed, any religion". The sense of relief is palpable. It is as if by wishing it life will go away.

Only the monarchy offers Coward a whole-hearted feeling of comfort. Surely the silence between royalty and showbiz has been one of the oddest features of Britain's imperial decline. Lew Grade's hand seems permanently to be clasping Queen Elizabeth's in some symbiotic bond. Perhaps the two factions recognize in each other a dependency for their survival on indiscriminate praise and masses of publicity. For whatever reasons the Windsors found in Coward their court

poet. They offered him no challenge. With them he knew his place and nothing would be said to upset him. No member of the family, however minor, failed to impress him with their "rdsiance" and good sense.

Was there ever a writer who had trouble putting words on paper, or who in the act of writing suffered his self-doubt? Partly, he tells us, it is because of "my extraordinary facility for writing dialogue", but over and above that, he just can't help being good. In *Which We Serve* is "a rattling good movie", "let's face it, most beautifully written". *Star Quality* is "nice and long... and also I think very good". *After The Ball* is "very good indeed". *Home and Colonial* is merely "very good", but *A Song At Twilight* is "really a rouser". "It is a good play I really believe."

Reading such stuff (and its opposite of Lillie Palmer "I have never worked with such a stupid bitch"; of Michael Redgrave "slow, pompous and obstructive"; of Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies "miserable little tart"; of the Beatles "senseless... bad-mannered little shits"), I found myself reminded all the time of Evelyn Waugh, a much cleverer man, but one whose disries simply illuminate his work. In a brilliant essay, Michael Frisvold observed that like all young comic novelists he began by imitating Waugh (just perhaps as most left boulevardiers start by imitating Coward), until he realized that Waugh's style was based on a set of beliefs which Frayn did not share. Waugh's comedy comes from the pretence that man is a hopeless victim of fate - or God as Waugh prefers to call it - and that any efforts he makes on his own behalf on earth are doomed to farcical failure. There is no end to the ludicrousness and stupidity of man. Only when Frayn realized he did not himself believe this, was he liberated to write in his own, considerable comic style. Waugh's diaries have always seemed to me the spade-work he did to develop a style for the novels; the mountain of personal unpleasantness, gleam a few perfect jokes, fakes an exultant that they could only be achieved by all the monstrous labour of a daily diary. Here now is Coward's spade-work, but sadly there are no jokes, or none worth repeating. Unlike Waugh he never wrote a single, truthful masterpiece - I am thinking of *A Handful Of Dust* - which vindicates the silliness of so much else. Like Waugh, Coward takes up an untenable position in the face of a changing world. Like Waugh, he believes ridiculous things. But Coward, crucially, lacks the cleverness to see that that is what he is doing. Waugh surveys the whole of life and finds it disappoints him. Coward doesn't dare to look.

## THE PLAY



The cover of *The Play Pictorial* magazine showing Noel Coward and Gertrude Lawrence in *Private Lives* in 1930; from *Advertising: Reflections of a Century* by Brian Holmes (324pp. Heinemann, £20. 0 434 34540 7), to be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of the TLS.

FICTION

## Waiting in the queue

D. J. Enright

TADEUSZ KONWICKI

The Polish Complex  
Translated by Richard Lourie  
211pp. Farrar, Straus and Giroux/  
Faber. £7.25.  
0 374 23548 1

It is helpful of the translator of this work to alert us in his introduction to the nature of the Polish complex. It resides, he says, in a trinity consisting of Poland's relationship with Russia, with the West, and with itself. Otherwise, since a pun seems to be involved here, one might have thought the complex to be simply masochism.

The novel is a comendous form, quite capable of sustaining a fair degree of philosophy, history, politics and other schematisms. The present example of that generous genre is not exactly avant-garde, but bears distinct traces of what were once thought of as modes of modernism. Notably, expressionism, with its mixture of aspiration and menace: the characters here (though most of them do have names) could as well be called by such typifications as The Writer, The Worker, The Student, The Informer, The Anarchist, The Peasant Woman. The last of these, incidentally, doubles for The Ex-Actress, while The Anarchist is a young Frenchman fascinated by Poland's eternal unrest: "He's seen Polish films, he knows about the Polish school."

It is Christmas Eve, and these characters are standing in a queue outside, sometimes inside, and sometimes in the vicinity of a Jewellery store ("named, with no particular finesse, 'The Jeweller'") which may have something to sell other than Soviet samovars if a shipment of rings and precious stones arrives. (It doesn't.) Or they are standing (or sitting) in "a line": this is an American translation, and - whether through faithfulness to the original or because of the translator's rough-and-readiness - singularly bare of literary graces.

The Writer is also The Narrator, and the Narrator is Mr Konwicki himself, a tormented soul, a tormented Polish soul. No one seems to like his books, least of all the pretty girls who are forced to read "that tripe of yours in high school", presumably early books, which he barely recognizes, social-realist stuff by the sound of it. These days, he confides, he writes for intelligent extra-terrestrial beings, beings "from the more elegant neighbourhoods of the Lord God's metropolises", better and wiser than we, because he is "bored by communication with my fellow men."

my fellow wise men and idiots, my fellow prophets and scoundrels, my fellow torturers and victims". As for himself, "I hate my prose. I hate it like a ghost, a bad memory, like pangs of conscience" - It is "like some sort of discharge oozing from my organism". And so it is. The novel is about wounds - it is about Polish history, how could it not be? - and to add to the effect the narrator is in physical pain much of the time and even suffers a curious, perhaps symbolic heart attack at one point. But the tearing off of bandages grows monotonous. The wounds thus displayed are, and various, but they tend to look much the same.

Also in the queue are Kojran, who professes to have been ordered to shoot Konwicki in 1951, and his friend Duszek, who used to work with the secret police and helped to put Kojran in prison in 1952. "Why bring it up", mutters Duszek. The wheel of fortune is no novelty here: who can keep up with its turns? Duszek, a giant clad in old-fashioned clothes, is the comic, given to uttering national apophthegms: "A Pole loses his temper when he has to wait", "A Pole gets sleepy when he thinks", "When evening comes, a Pole starts reminiscing", "When a Pole gets a balcony, he wants to jump". "Give a Pole freedom, he'll outdo everyone". The maxim "When a Pole complains, he feels better right away" comes from the suspected agent provocateur, in imitation of Duszek; but it is the narrator himself, on the last page of the novel, who utters, with extra animus: "When a Pole flies into a fury, than woe to blind, slothful, venal Europe."

Konwicki, or the narrator called Konwicki, says that he had planned to



Polish costumes from the end of the sixteenth century, based on drawings by Jan Matejko; from *A Republic of Nobles: Studies in Polish History to 1864*, edited by J. K. Fodorowicz, to be reviewed in a future issue of the TLS.

be a cosmopolitan writer, an agent of universalism, an Esperantist of the spirit, concerning himself solely with the soul of *Homo sapiens*, but through the intervention of some wicked fairy he has been turned into "a stubborn, ignorant, furious Pole". He flounders back and forth through his little homeland's miserable history. Poland was a good, noble country, dedicated to lofty ideals, or (in a characteristically masochistic phrase) to "positive, exemplary, copybook values". And what happened? Those ideals led to its undoing. "Our entire Golgotha comes from that untimely eruption of individualism." It is a case of Look here, upon this picture, and on this; the other picture being of "our sister Russia": despotism, ridiculous defeats in war, barbarity, corruption, poverty, indolence, stupidity. ... But Russia had the luck, Russia emerged as a vast and powerful state.

And yet, and yet... While it is true to say that nobility will always succumb to villainy and freedom dia or the hands of those who have none, it is equally true - or, "one may equally say" - that righteousness will conquer sin, freedom will prevail over slavery. "But let us remember that the good is free like a cloud in the sky and that evil is swift as lightning." We should remember better if we understood better. If only the narrator's missing the clarity of Duszek's one-liners! Ah, but Konwicki has already told us that, although they may understand his sentences when translated, his fellow men on the Tiber, the Seine and the Hudson will not truly understand him or his fate - "because I am a Pole". Moreover, they should thank God that they don't understand him, yet.

Universalism seems to have

reasserted itself here, in the warning or the threat that one day we shall understand - when "like a hail cloud, my *fanon* blows over to the West and stands above your country, your home, your land, when the torturers of the Great Destiny drag you from your warm bed and begin endlessly torturing you with a hopeless daily life, gags, shackles...". Doom is to be universal, and in our case apparently, and somewhat in the spirit of Solzhenitsyn, without the consoling knowledge of a noble origin. Masochism, one might feel, has turned into sadism; or at least self-punishment has modulated in the punishing of others.

The novel's most vivid passages and its warmest characters occur in the flashback to the failed rebellions of 1830 and 1863. The latter and lengthier of these (it comes earlier in the book) is especially fine, a brilliant evocation.

recalling some of Tolstoy's scenes. This was the time when, as the translator puts it, Poland was identified by its romantic poets as "the Christ of nations", crucified yet with the hope of resurrection. Konwicki mocks the romanticism, but only lightly, seeking to recapture the dreams of the young patriot colonel, Zygmunt Minceyko, his precursor by some eighty years, as yet unhardened with the weight of experience and unpoisoned by disappointment. Zygmunt finds that most of his promised volunteers have dispersed to their work in the fields and, after an ambush that ends in fiasco, is betrayed to the Cossacks by peasants greedy for reward. The section ends with "that question which is always with us" - "Was it worth it?"

The Polish Complex is a prime example of the kind of novel, unthinkingly and admiringly in its intentions, that makes the reader feel guilty for not liking it more wholeheartedly. And not merely because it was hatched in its native country, for it does have a dark unsparingly about it, even a tarnished but genuine nobility. No doubt it is foolish to wish that the vitality, the hope, could begin to measure up to the disillusionment and self-satisfaction, or to regret that, from a study of the problem children of Europe, what emerges seems much like a study in problem geriatrics. Apart from tinges of mysticism, the "indiscipherable visins" mentioned in the book's closing paragraph - it is not Christmas Eve for nothing - the most we are offered in the way of cheer, and almost as an afterthought, is a variety of sticism. On the penultimate page there is a remark, or a Polish joke, about the rightness of instinct, set off by a wader's vulgar retort to Konwicki's request that he should be good enough to turn his flame-thrower on him: "One must live. There is some sense to all this senselessness."

## Elliott Messman [Editor] THE CORRESPONDENCE OF BORIS PASTERNAK AND OLGA FREIDENBERG 1910-1954

"No, not a novel: life in twentieth-century Russia. Two marvellous characters; a marvellous book." D. M. Thomas, *Observer*

"This collection of letters exchanged between Nobel prize-winner Boris Pasternak and his cousin Olga Freidenberg may well turn out to be the most dynamic, revealing and fascinating personal document to come out of the Soviet Union... I cannot think of a book which so illuminates the experience of what it was and still is like to be an artist or scholar in the Soviet Union." Kay Dick, *Standard*

"This is an absorbing book, and the translation by Elliott Messman and Margaret Weitin is excellent." *Kyril Fitzpatrick, Sunday Telegraph*

"This remarkable exchange of letters..." Henry Gifford, *Guardian* £15.00

## Dan Jacobson THE STORY OF THE STORIES

"To read this book is to enjoy the company of an erudite, original and stimulating mind." *Chaim Bermant, Daily Telegraph*

"Mr Jacobson's fascinating and finely written essay... a rich book and one to re-read and think about."

*Conrad O'Brien, Observer*

"A sensitive and scrupulous inquiry into a most important aspect of this book of books."

*John Ryle, New Society*

"Jacobson tackles these paradoxes with a fine sense of parallelism, a sharp ear for echoes, for events transformed into metaphors, for questions which theologians have raised."

*Martin Jarrett-Kerr, Guardian* £5.95

## Gerd Christian Seeber THE ABDUCTION

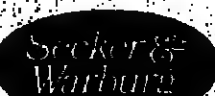
"An exciting tale of a holiday kidnapping in Italy and a distraught father trying to raise ransom money he doesn't have..." *Daily Mail*

"The Abduction is a peculiarly effective book... (the author) manages to create a full aura of appropriate tension and worry."

*David Gibson, Sunday Standard*

"Compelling, fascinating, gripping... I have just read an author's first novel which made all these descriptions and more."

*Kent and Sussex Courier* £7.50



already precociously vivid. The Bliss family invite four guests to their house for the weekend and proceed to treat them nonchalantly. A vicious combination of casual neglect and deliberate embarrassment rapidly drives them from the premises. We feel for the victims, but do not side with them. The Bliss may be rude but they have it in them to enjoy spontaneously, self-indulgently and vivaciously. They stand for life, and pomposity and timidity (however pitiable) are equally offences against it. As early as 1924 Coward is giving memorable comic expression to the ethic which was Walter Pater's principal bequest to the modernist generation.

This sense that life must urgently be relished and that dullness has no claims upon us is developed five years later in *Private Lives*. Here art (or at least theatricality) is replaced by sex as the embodiment of vitality. Elyot and Amanda are engaged in a search for the true life of the emotions. At the beginning of the first act, bruised by a previous encounter, both choose to see love as a kind of refectory sleep. "Love," in Elyot's words, "is an use unless it's wise and kind and undramatic." This devitalizing contention the play, briskly and comically, proceeds to overturn. In the last scene the dull are shown to be just as quarrelsome as the passionate, without their compensating zest.

*Design for Living*, in 1932, marks the arrival of complex plot in Coward's comedy but in other respects is disappointing. The protagonists are both actors and artists. Unfortunately, unlike Elyot Chase or Judith Bliss, they do not love and creating offstage. Coward corrects this misjudgment in *Present Laughter*, once again, as in *Hay Fever*, using theatricality as his emblem of the vital. The creativity expressed by Grry Essendine's production team has an importance which can legitimately brush aside the tyranny of conventional emotion. *Billie Spirit* takes a similar theme but adds an extraordinary symbolic dimension. Here death is spoken for by the literally dead, while Madame Arcati's professional morbidity is wittily transformed into a mode of vivacious curiosity. The quick and the dead explicitly confront each other and the quick, as always in Coward's major plays, achieve an exultant victory.

The emotions engendered by such comedies as these, inevitably, I think, remind us of a funniness in some earlier exercise in the same genre. Here are indeed characters who break through no laws or conscientious restraints because they know of none, who have got out of Christendom into the land where pleasure is duty and the manners perfect freedom. And like Lamb returning from the comedies of the Restoration, we can return from Coward's plays to our cage and our restraint: "the fresher and more healthy for it". These are plays which leave us, however briefly, with a sense of how eyelid, urgent and delightful life is. It is time the critics said so.

## Nonchalant nothings

Harold Hobson

RONALD HOWARD (Editor)

Trivial Fond Records by Leslie Howard  
187pp. William Kimber. £9.50.  
0 7183 0418 7

Just over thirty years ago a young actor, bending a famous name, gave a memorable performance as the blundering, bewildered, wandering soldier in Peter Brook's production of John Whiting's *A Penny For A Song*. When this play was revived by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1962 (six years after *Look Back In Anger*) this sad and puzzled figure had been transformed into an imitation Jimmy Porter, a transformation which made some people doubt Whiting's artistic integrity. The young actor, too, has changed, though without losing any of his original qualities. He is no longer, but has - in appearance - his own words - retired sensibly, though not without regrets, to an art gallery in West Dorset. There he has, over the poppers of his celebrated parent, some of which he

here, reprints. This is the origin of *Trivial Fond Records*, by Leslie Howard, edited by his son.

Leslie Howard, the elegant, nonchalant star of so many light comedies and famous films (including *Gone With The Wind*, which he much resented) was not naturally fitted to be an actor. Just as Nelson was habitually shy and reserved, and he always felt that acting was the most embarrassing thing in the world. His total ease upon the stage, his apparent carelessness charm, were an achievement of will and in some ways more fitted to be a writer than a player. He had considerable powers of close observation, and could observe and describe with cheerful accuracy the various ways in which his fellow-players, in a play, essayed a performance. In a recent essay, devastating passage on the skill with which Jeanne Eagels in *Her Cabin Boy* could manipulate a show when she had nothing to say in order to divert the audience's attention from those of her colleagues who were not at the centre of the stage. He noted things outside the theatre just as closely as he

did those within. As soon as he arrived in New York at the age of twenty-seven he was struck by the number of hideous iron fire-escapes there were on 23rd Street. Could there really, he asked himself, be so much danger of fire in the city?

He wrote articles on such subjects as these for *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*. He spoke of American clubs, Broadway, the Elevated Railway, of rehearsals, of old actors explaining why they were playing small parts as a special favour, to the management, and with particular brilliance and humorous psychological insight, of the tormented ecstasy of the first night of triumph. In these sketches Leslie Howard has the lightness of touch, the wit, and the ever so little cynical malice of a prose: J. K. Stephen, or a Thackeray contemplating the prospect of British tourists. He is trivial, of course, and so were they, immortally so; but his sly realization of a time when a big first night (and with a Jack Buchanan and a Gerald du Maurier, a Barrymore were not all first nights big) was as much a sensation as a Wimbledon final, gives a more vivid impression of how people lived and

moved and talked than most serious histories do.

Ronald Howard has linked these various essays both by extracts from his father's diaries and by a narrative of his own. This does not claim to be more than a small thing, but it is a small thing beautifully done. Beside, the public fame of a highly successful career is set a private man perplexed by affection, by doubt, and by temptation. His affection for his son, whom he called Wink, is touching, and his anxiety over Wink's childish problems might serve as a model for many a father.

There are some gestures of Ronald's unease. There is pain when Leslie does not mention in his diary the birth of Ronald's mother; a brief suggestion that the book is dedicated to his memory Leslie: from potentially dangerous women; and the fact that when Leslie was shot down during the war Ronald wrote some poems which he does not reprint. He gives us instead two very "written" in a somewhat different vein. These things, of course, may mean nothing. One wonders, but does not know.

*Trivial Fond Records* may seem

slight to some readers, but it is an enchanting book. Indirectly it raises the question whether the theatre today is better than it was to Leslie's time. Certainly Howard appeared in many poor plays like *Her Cabin Boy*: Love as well as some unsatisfactory films. But he also played in several excellent pieces: *Escape*, *Berkeley Square*, *The Petrified Forest*, and, of course, *Gone With The Wind*. But in these it is to be noted that there was a spirit quite different from that which activates the most lively drama of today. Both kinds of drama affect contemporary problems. Heywood Brown, writing in 1929, said: "*Berkeley Square* has the advantage of dealing with a transcendental theme, and so the spectator doesn't so much forget the price of Nevada Consolidated Copper as gain a mood in which the money doesn't seem to matter." To put the matter crudely, Heywood's theatre endeavoured, to strengthen men's hearts against things like the great stockmarket crash, while the most powerful dramatists of the 1980s would prefer to see the stockmarket and all that it implies, including Nevada Consolidated Copper, destroyed in the sure and certain hope of a glorious, but not yet fully defined, resurrection.











## A watching brief

Anne Duchêne

ELIZABETH TAYLOR  
The Last Visitor  
BBC TV

Those who tuned in last week to BBC-2's *The Last Visitor*, unaware of Elizabeth Taylor novels, solely because the locale was announced as Seething-on-Sea and the hero's name as Vincent Timulty, must have found their grasser expectations pretty severely baffled; but so were the spitter hopes of those who still hold Elizabeth Taylor in respect as a precise and perceptive novelist, who by virtue of these qualities is also often very funny and frequently disquieting. Her work is very sharply-pointed and humorous, and might have come into higher relief if it had not been

## Grave matters

Paul Bailey

JOHN FLANAGAN AND ANDREW McCULLOCH

STIFF Options  
Theatre Royal, Stratford East

*Stiff Options* is set in an undertaker's parlour in Slighthorpe, a small town in Lancashire. The establishment belongs to Samuel Stringer, a man accustomed to looking death in the face, and, strangely, "Death", in fact, is a word that never, under any circumstances, springs to Samuel's lips. For the people he steers towards the grave and the incinerator have "passed on" or "passed over" or "passed away". They have met their "demise".

Samuel has known hard times. Forty years ago, when the National Health Service was in its infancy, Slighthorpe was a haven for morticians. Business boomed. "Flu" epidemics ensured success. Samuel fondly recalls the 1930s, when the "demise" industry was at its peak: the Olden Age that preceded socialism and a lowering of the mortality rate.

At the start of *Stiff Options*, a sprightly farce by two young actors, John Flanagan, and Andrew McCulloch, Samuel is in an optimistic mood. Mrs Thatcher, fresh from her triumph in the South Atlantic, has now declared war on the B.U.P.A.-less hordes who hunt the nation's hospitals. Each cut-back brings a smile to Samuel's professionally lugubrious features. He is exultant when he reads the latest another cancer research unit has had to close down for lack of funds.

Samuel's only rival in Slighthorpe is the Co-op, since the days of the local undertakers sold his premises "the finger lickin' chicken people". Stringer & Co and the Co-op are literally fighting to the demise for custom. To this end, Samuel employs his brother-in-law, the put-upon Edgar Winstanley, as his spotter. Edgar has a genuine flair for spotting those on the verge of kicking the bucket. "Edgar

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established under the ascendancy of Elizabeth Bowen and all those lethally fluttering emmas. *The Sleeping Beauty*, her 1953 novel, adapted by Thomas Ellis this week, is not one of her best; but it is more than an essay in the decorously Gothic, as it becomes here, and deserves also to be more than a demonstration of how much we lose when we can only watch and occasionally eavesdrop.

Elmer Cossy's elegant photography in the end-of-season seaside resort makes watching, in itself, very enjoyable. And someone (can it be Rodney Bennett, the director, who otherwise seems to be making the best of a delicate and difficult job?) so much wants us to enjoy watching that Celia Gregory, the heroine, is as beautiful as most young women ever aspire to becoming; whereas most of the story's tension depends on her having been traumatically scarred in an air-accident. (Her unveiling of a scarred shoulder

knows a hole in the heart when he sees one", his boss declares proudly. A fat, elderly jogger has been under Edgar's helpful inspection for some months, and it is a joyful Samuel who learns early in the play that the man has jogged for the first time.

Samuel decides to take an assistant in preparation for the great days ahead. The man he hires in error is an East End gangster who is being sought by the Slighthorpe police. Dennis, alias Ronnie Black, is suspected of shooting five men in a nearby pub, four of whom - Samuel later discovers - have been claimed by the Co-op. The corpse that is destined to receive the unique Stringer treatment is that of an unemployed and impecunious Scot, Dennis has no alternative but to join the firm, and it is with his acceptance of Samuel's pittance that the farce really takes off.

*Stiff Options* functions in that sub-world made immortal by Donald McGill. Instead of low jokes about sex (though there are a few of those), the authors offer low jokes about death and dying. A reference to cancer stops the show at each performance. My main criticism of this delightfully grisly piece is that it sometimes lacks the courage of its own tastelessness, and wanders away from the ever-interesting subject that provides its inspiration. Some luscious stuff about Women's Lib seems to have been lacking on for no valid theatrical reason, and the bent copper's revelations - the last inventive running gag among scores of good ones - are embarrassingly feeble and heavy-handed. Shorn of some of this detritus, *Stiff Options* will be wholly worthy of its skilled interpreters - Michael Elphick, who twitches to memorable effect as Dennis; Bryan Pringle, whose sepulchral Samuel only lacks a certain manic gleam to make it perfect; Lesley Duff, a ludicrous Miss Unemployed, Slighthorpe; Harold Goodwin, the return of the demise penally, and the matchless Pat Keen, clad in pink dungarees, who plays Slighthorpe's most forbidding theatrical landlady with Wignerian authenticity.

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only encourages thoughts about how vain she must have been before the accident.)

Watching Jeremy Brett is also quite agreeable, of course. Discreet BBC hallyhoos suggests he came back specially from the United States to play the lone and, as it turns out, flawed male, among this story's variously desperate women - the widows, the scarred girl, the mentally retarded girl, the hero's own mother. In fact, his tweeds look so solid and well cut that it takes some time to decide exactly what he was doing, though later one sees there are clues: when one of the widows says that we are all always alone, he murmurs, "No need of God, otherwise", and when the scarred girl asks if he is glad she has been alone into the town he breathes with doggy ardour, "I am, intransigently", but although it may be to Mr Brett's credit that it takes so long to decide why such a good actor seems like a curstie releasing *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, the delay does not help to make the action seem less accidental. Perhaps this is partly because his mother, loyally played by Mans Washburne, is postulated as very possessive and also a bird-watcher, but is given no time to appear in either capacity.

The film, in short, lacks resonance, remains a small chamber without echoes. Some moments recall the original (as when someone describes other people's grief as "the washing up of a meal one hasn't eaten"), and the acting is almost always admirable, notably with Rosalind Shanks, as a marginal but fierce and poignant widow, weeping into her ironing, and when Adam Blackwood and Christine Shaw, endow their short appearances with almost dangerous solidity. The principal characters, though, are not invested with more than their conventional appearance, and their moral ambiguities remain unclear: the sad, small, exact universe in which their creator first set them does not emerge. Presumably, it takes ninety minutes of film to do justice to an averagely good short story.

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## Author, Author

Competition No 90  
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than October 22. A prize of £10 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or failing that, the most nearly correct - in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration.

Entries, marked "Author, Author 90" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on October 29.

1 If in the neighbourhood of the commercial and literary town of Glasgow's race of cannibals has really existed, we may contemplate in the period of the Scottish history the opposite extremes of savage and civilized life. Such reflections tend to enlarge the circle of our ideas, and to encourage the pleasing hope that New Zealand may produce in some future age the Hume of the Southern Hemisphere.

2 He lashed the promiscuity and publicity of even the good restaurants. The promiscuous feeding gave him a feeling of disgust. So he walked down the beautiful slope to the water again, and sat on a seat by himself, near a clump of strange palm-trees that made a weird noise in the breeze. The water was blue and dancing; and again he felt as if the harbour were wild, lost and undiscovered, as it was in Captain Cook's time. The city wasn't real.

3 Geographers, who say the world's a sphere, are either ignorant, or mazed with base, Or liars - or have never read two pages Of any of our novelists or sages Who tell us plainly that the world's more wide.

On the colonist than the colon  
That sisters and kingdoms use for  
Than ranches, farms and  
And that wherever an the world  
A province or protectorate  
The place straightway to vast prop  
As with the galore at a dose of  
mumps...

Competition No 86  
Winner: Edward Mendelson  
Answers:

1 Bei Dirty Dick und Sloppy Joe,  
da trunk man Schnaps nur pur  
und ging treppauf mit Margy  
und auch mit Kate, o weh.  
Und zwel und zwel wie Katz und  
hat man kein Heim und spielet

W. H. Auden, "Song of the  
Master and Boatwale", translated  
by Ernst Jandl

2 Des Weekend kommt - einst war  
als freier Tag noch, aber nicht mehr  
als Freitag,  
ein Loch in der Zeit, mit eigenem  
Rhythmus,  
wo niemand sich kümmert, was sich  
Nachher tut  
Jetzt braucht man var allem Zeitung  
und Radio

W. H. Auden, "City without  
Walls", translated by Will Keller

3 Versteht sich, dass die Boys das  
hinusjuben müssen,  
ein so riesiger Phallus-Triumph, der  
Aberlein,  
an das Frauen freilich nicht im  
gedacht hätten...

W. H. Auden, "Moon  
Landing", translated by Herbert  
Zand

## Among this week's contributors

PAUL BAILEY's most recent book, *An English Midwife*, will be reviewed shortly in the TLS.

LUCKY BECKETT teaches English at Ampleforth College. Her most recent book is *Parafal*, 1981.

C. R. BOXER's recent books include *Jan Compagnie: its War and Peace, 1602-1799: a short history of the Dutch East-India Company*, 1979.

AMTHUR C. DANTO's most recent book is *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 1981.

MICHAEL DAVIS is the editor of *Evelyn Waugh's Diaries*, 1976.

D. J. ENRIGHT's *Collected Poems* were published in 1981.

JOHN FORRESTER is the author of *Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis*, 1980.

OAKTH POWDER is a Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge.

JOHN FULLER's most recent collection of poems is *Waiting for the Music*, 1981.

DAVID GASCOYNE's *Collected Poems* were published in 1965. His *Journal 1936-37* was published in 1980.

DAVID HARRIS's most recent play, *Map of the World*, will be performed at the National Theatre early next year.

ROBERT HEWISON's *In Angry Culture: the Cold War 1945-1960* was published last year.

PATRICE HIGDON's *Chess, Ideology and the Rights of Nobles during the French Revolution* will be reviewed shortly in the TLS.

NICHOLAS VON HOFFMAN is the Washington correspondent of the *Spectator*.

CHARLES HOPE is a lecturer in Renaissance Studies at the Warburg Institute. He is the author of *Tilman*, 1980.

GEORFFREY HOSKING's books include *Beyond Socialist Realism: Soviet Fiction since 'Ivan Denisovich'*, 1980.

DAN JACOBSON's most recent book, *The Story of the Stories: The Chosen People and Its God* will be reviewed shortly in the TLS.

DOUGLAS JOHNSON is Professor of French History at University College London.

CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE is a lecturer in the History of Medicine at the Wellcome Institute, London.

HUGH LLOYD-JONES is Regius Professor of Greek at the University of Oxford.

NEIL MACCORMICK is Regius Professor of Public Law at the University of Edinburgh.

ANTHONY PADDEN's *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the origins of comparative ethnology* work has just been published.

LOUIS PARRY was Professor of German at Manchester University from 1963 to 1978.

TOM PAULIN's most recent collection of poems is *In the Strange Museum*, 1981.

S. N. PLAICE's most recent translation is of Tankred Dorst's *Marika*.

PATRICK POLLARD is a lecturer in French at Birkbeck College, London.

S. S. PRAWER's *Heine's Jewish Comedy* will be published shortly.

DAVID PRYCE-JONES's books include *Poems in the Third Reich: A History of the German Occupation 1933-1944*, 1981.

NICHOLAS SHIRINGTON is a Fellow of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford.

CLIVE SINCLAIR's most recent collection of stories, *Bedbugs*, was published earlier this year.

C. H. SISSON's *Selected Poems* were published last year.

PAUL SMITH is Professor of Modern History at the University of Southampton.

ANTHONY STORR's books include *The Art of Psychotherapy*, 1979.

PHILIP THOOR's books include *Robert Barthes: A Conservative Estimate*, 1977.

GEZA VERMES is a Reader in Jewish Studies at the University of Oxford.

JOHN WHITE is Professor of the History of Art at University College London.

## Public Lending Right

Sir, - From the moment it was published as a Bill, the Public Lending Right Act, 1979, has been notorious for muddle and inconsistency. Writers, myself included, pointed out that it uses the word "books" sometimes to mean the actual, tangible volumes and at other (unsignposted) times to mean what the book trade calls "titles". The author of this tangled web had the advice of professionals accustomed to wielding words without ambiguity. However, he was kept or kept himself in anonymous seclusion from the organizations of writers that were campaigning for PLR. The government warned us that if we tried to have the conception or the wording of the Bill improved we should risk losing the measure itself.

Now the draftsman of the document has burst out of anonymity on to your letters page of September 17. It would be natural if bad conscience had impelled him to public confession. Instead (and this is perhaps a symptom of habitual muddle on his part) he makes a snide and ignorant attack on his victims.

The Act entered the statute book dragging its tail behind it. Against the wishes of the writers, who would have preferred to finish the matter in an act and had precise proposals ready for doing so, the Act left the government with the duty of framing secondary legislation in the form of a "scheme" laying down the administrative rules of PLR. From 1979 to 1982, the civil servants and the authors whom the Act bound them to consult had to struggle to frame a scheme that would work and that yet should abide by the rickety and self-contradictory outline imposed by the Act Mr Carter drafted.

Some of the provisions he drafted are, evidently, obscure even to him. He speaks of expecting devices to be applied after the passing of the Act to prevent the PLR pool from being scooped by "the persons estate of Dame Agatha Christie". Yet according to the best interpretation the civil servants and their lawyers can work out of Mr Carter's words, it is in reality his Act that makes any author ineligible for PLR if he died without being registered.

There is no truth in the Impression Mr Carter gives that the question of the entitlement of compilers of dictionaries and textbooks, illustrators, joint authors and editors, writers of short stories published together, etc, etc is now being "left to the judgment of the unfortunate Registrar". The answer in each of these cases, including many others, is meticulously spelled out in the scheme, which received final parliamentary approval in April of this year. How careless of Mr Carter to draft an Act that required a scheme to be framed and then write you a letter on the subject without bothering to read the scheme.

Neither is it true that the public funding of PLR was a last-minute, last-ditch option of the government's. From the outset (1972), it was an essential item in the programme of Writers Action Group, which was determined that the public library service should not be impaired.

Unlike buyers of TV licences, theatre tickets or chocolate, borrowers of books from public libraries have an unrestricted opportunity to sample the goods before selecting one. Despite this, Mr Carter is furthering the public library's task of drafting legislation. Part of his argument is that the PLR legislation is unworkable in practice. If the legislation is so faulty, this must be either because the ministerial instructions to the parliamentary counsel were inadequate or because the draftsman were themselves at fault in their work. Geoffrey Carter (who, I take it, is retired) blames his ministerial masters, but there have been sufficient complaints in recent years about inadequate drafting of legislation to make the second a possible cause. At any rate, it becomes someone, apparently responsible for the drafting of a piece of legislation

in a just world would be the penalty of writing bad books". Carter's supposedly just world is, presumably, a world without PLR payments - in other words, the world we have now and will continue to have until February 1984. In that world, no penalty in fact falls on an author whose book is returned to the library the day after it is borrowed that does not fall equally on an author whose book is not returned for three weeks. In this respect, Carter's words appear to mean something but don't.

They do, however, propound a remarkable aesthetic. Their inescapable meaning is that, should a borrower take *King Lear* home, and after five pages, find "that it is rubbish", Carter holds Shakespeare guilty of "writing bad books" and thinks he should suffer some "penalty". (What, incidentally, if one borrower thinks *King Lear* rubbish but another thinks it wonderful?)

A little further on, Carter has a fresh complaint. Now the PLR fund is being used up by popular writers leaving nothing, or only a few pence a year, for writers of quality with small public appeal. Who, however, are these writers of quality who do not appeal to many borrowers? Carter has just told us that a writer who doesn't appeal to a borrower writes "bad books" and should be penalized. Recognizably, this is the intellect that drafted the muddled Act.

Mr Carter sneers at writers (apparently in ignorance that illustrators, too, are eligible for PLR), sneers doubly at writers of fiction and sneers triply at writers of fiction who are women. His highest contempt, however, is for Parliament, New Zealand, Australia, Sweden, Denmark and West Germany all have PLR systems, of various legislative and administrative natures. In Britain, however, where the problem has by far the largest library network in the western world, Parliament is, according to Carter, "impotent". Its attempt to keep our written culture alive won't, he alleges, work in practice and is "bogus" in concept. Other democracies are flexible enough, when they perceive a problem, to try to solve it. In Britain, none of the previously existing statutory concepts precisely fitted the new problem created by the mass-scale, publicly funded lending of books. So, according to Carter, Parliament should have done nothing and should just have let the writing of books expire. Even people who refuse to despair of parliamentary democracy may reasonably be worried by parliamentary draftsman.

BRIGID BROPHY,  
Flat 3, 185 Old Brompton Road,  
London SW5.

Sir, - May I comment on the letter by Geoffrey Carter on PLR (September 17)? Perhaps first though I ought to declare an interest: as an academic I write books (although I do not expect to benefit from PLR) and I am married to someone who is what Geoffrey Carter calls, genteelly but apparently pejoratively, a "lady novelist".

I do not wish to comment on the content of Geoffrey Carter's letter. These seem to me to be risible, but I'm sure you'll have plenty of responses to his arguments from those more capable than I of answering them. I wish rather to comment on its source. Mr Carter is a (one-time?) member of the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, a civil service body charged with the purely technical task of drafting legislation. Part of his argument is that the PLR legislation is unworkable in practice. If the legislation is so faulty, this must be either because the ministerial instructions to the parliamentary counsel were inadequate or because the draftsman were themselves at fault in their work. Geoffrey Carter (who, I take it, is retired) blames his ministerial masters, but there have been sufficient complaints in recent years about inadequate drafting of legislation to make the second a possible cause. At any rate, it becomes someone, apparently responsible for the drafting of a piece of legislation

to complain about its workability. Of course the main burden of Geoffrey Carter's letter is a complaint about the policy intended behind the legislation. Here it needs to be said that, whatever the impression given, the mere fact that Mr Carter was involved in the drafting of PLR legislation does not give him any particular competence to assess it in policy terms. These are skills required by many civil servants, but not from those in the Office of which Mr Carter was a member.

JACK LIVERY,  
Duck End, Great Rollright, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire.

## to the editor

George Grosz

Sir, - In your review (September 10) of George Grosz's autobiography, *A Small Yes and a Big No*, in a translation by A. J. Pommeroy, your reviewer S. S. Prawer says that this autobiography appeared in German in 1955 and "is now made, as the publishers claim, 'fully available in English for the first time'".

It is a pity that the publishers' claim was not examined, for it appears that an American translation published in 1946 under the title *A Little Yes and a Big No* pre-dated the publication of the original German by nine years.

The American version is copyrighted by Grosz himself and the preface is signed by Grosz from New York City and dated September 1946. The translator was Lois Sells Dorin and the publisher the Dial Press, New York. It would seem that Grosz must himself have read and approved this translation. In these circumstances a close comparison of the two translations, including all illustrative matter, could have been most valuable, particularly to a reader who holds, as I do, the original American version. This version appears to contain more material than that under review, for it totals 343 pages, but on the other hand no chapter has a title remotely resembling "A glimpse of the thirteenth room".

What, exactly, is "fantastic" or quirky about my father's use of words such as "precognizing", "devoiment", "dulitude", "juvenile", and "dolent"? Why does Sir Charles consider them a departure from Nabokov's tradition of literary style? As a translator, does he not know that a plainer English word may not necessarily be "technically appropriate" (Vladimir Nabokov, "Reply to my Critics"), or best render the "reverberating" (ibid.), "evocative" (ibid.), or simply slightly archaic shading of the Pushkin usage? I strongly recommend that Sir Charles peruse "Reply to my Critics" in Nabokov's *Strong Opinions*, where such matters are explained in detail.

As for "the odd case of the 'shaman'" (3 XL, not 3 XI), Sir Charles has obviously trundled his heaviest artillery into an obscure Cornish tin mine in search of an easy laugh. If we are going to consult dictionaries, let us do it right. Both the venerable thirteen-volume *OED* and various other, lighter lexica, before they get to mining matters (the Llanbradach Colliery would have been another good one), first of all define "shaman" as "a shooter". And a "shooter" (first definition, *OED*) is "one who shoots with a bow or with firearms; in early use, an archer; now chiefly applied to a sportsman who shoots game"; or (first definition, Webster's *New International Dictionary*, 2nd edition, Father's copy) "one who shoots, as an archer, a gunner, a shot-shooter, or a hunter; esp., a sportsman".

I assume Nabokov chose "shaman" because it combined a rifle-shooter, in a sense akin to the Russian; an echo of "sportsman"; and the delicate connotation of another era. In the muck of his mine, Sir Charles has stumbled on a perfect example of Nabokovian literary alchemy: a word was needed and found that was at once technically accurate, poetically evocative, and suggestive of the proper nuance in Pushkin's *strelak*.

May I also draw your readers' attention to two misprints in the final paragraph of my earlier letter (September 3): in the quotation from my father's translation, the word "harnesses" should appear as "harnessed"; and in that from Sir Charles Johnston's version "coaches" should read "coachs".

DMITRI NABOKOV,  
Mooreux-Palace Hotel, 1820  
Montreux, Switzerland.

## Cochin

Sir, - Even Eric Korn (Reminders, September 10) should not be allowed to place Cochin in Andhra Pradesh; it belongs in Kerala, where Malayalam is spoken (Andhra Pradesh boasts of Telugu). "Mullagatany" probably originated from the East India Company's Sepoy base in Madras, where the language is Tamil (*Mollagga* = chillies or pepper; *thony* = water).

PRABHU S. GUPTARA,  
106A Weydon Hill Road,  
Farnham, Surrey.

George Grosz

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# The omnipotence of the World

Idris Parry

**KARI GRIMSTAD**  
Masks of the Prophet: The Theatrical World of Karl Kraus  
297pp. University of Toronto Press.  
£28.25.  
0 8020 5522 2

**NIKE WAGNER**  
Geist und Geschlecht: Karl Kraus und die Erotik der Wiener Moderne  
288pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. DM32.  
3 518 04421 8

The "theatrical world" of Kuri Grimstad's title refers both to contacts with actual theatre, mainly through criticism of plays and actors, and to theatrical qualities in Karl Kraus himself. The material for the book is drawn mainly from *Die Fackel*, the journal founded by Kraus in 1899 and continued by him until 1936, the year of his death.

Kraus's connection with theatre began in a conventional way but soon became unusual. As a young man in Vienna he wanted to be an actor. His opportunity came in 1893, when he played the part of Franz Moor in a suburban production of Schiller's *The Robbers*. He invited his literary friends from the Café Griensteidl to witness his triumph. It was a calamitous evening, Kraus blamed the disastrous impression made by his performance on a wig and costume which were far too big. For the rest of his life he seems to have wrestled with that wig and costume. One can only speculate how much of his subsequent philosophy is testimony to the effect of towering on the stage. From now on he became increasingly convinced that the tricks and paraphernalia of the practical stage do nothing but harm to genuine drama.

After this he hardly ever went to the theatre. That did not stop him criticizing theatre productions. He generally based his judgment on personal reaction to press reviews. If he disapproved of lots of reviewers (he would take an opposite stance on play and performance. The actor Alexander Molssi was one of many who had a bad time at Kraus's hands. In Molssi's case it was because he had worked with Max Reinhardt, who was not only a rotten producer but had peculiar handwriting and, worst of all, had acted with Kraus in that 1893 production. Molssi must therefore be inadequate by induction. "I have neither seen nor heard Molssi portray the dying Faust, but of course I object to his performance."

Disavowal by induction became a common ploy with Kraus. He found society second-rate in language, contemptible in morals, so it followed that if Bernard Shaw was applauded by society audiences, this could only mean Shaw was second-rate. Hofmannsthal and Schnitzler, observed from the same height of moral indignation, were judged and found wanting. Pirandello was condemned mainly because Shaw and Reinhardt praised him. Such equitation of ethics and aesthetics can lead to literary criticism which on its own merits.

There are certainly times when Kraus is so idiosyncratic in his opinions that we are bound to find ourselves in the position of Gogol's Chichikov when he can't make up his mind if a certain landowner is an utter idiot or merely a fool. Kraus was by no means an idiot. We can't absolve him so easily from foolishness. It may be that folly was the price he had to pay for success. When a man makes personal polemics into a way of life he runs a serious risk of error; this attitude of animosity also spurred Kraus to his greatest triumphs as a satirist.

He hated wit; he took people at their word and then analysed the words. Grammar seemed to tell him something about the intentions of speakers. A man's nature, he believed, becomes apparent in the way he uses language. Men careless of language must be careless in morals, so that style was the measure of ethical values, and his journal in drainage, by contrast, the broad marshes of phraseology. Society was telling lies about itself, but he can tell the truth.

about the user. What gave Kraus his driving force was the fact that he took these lies as personal insults. He could never be reconciled to hypocrisy. In his journal he created a kind of private stage. No scenery to distract from thought, no actors to ruin the words. A fictitious device was to print without comment an extract from the hated Viennese press. He might add a relevant title. By isolating the lie he made it sharply apparent. When he used this technique, Kraus was being truly dramatic: he did not describe, discuss or directly criticize, he let the age speak for itself, in character. He pinned the age down between quotation marks, displaying and dissecting his language specimens with what he justifiably called "a disgust bordering on heroism".

Kraus's public readings seemed to emerge naturally from the dramatic qualities of his journal. They were to become a feature of Viennese cultural life. He began them in 1910 with passages from *Die Fackel*, ready-made for recitation. From 1916 he added readings of complete plays, at first by Shakespeare and Molière. He later called it his "Theatre of Literature", meaning it was different from normal theatre, which was in his opinion fit only for mindless entertainment. Great drama was literature. Only bad plays, he thought, were suitable for performance on the stage.

Kraus believed the only way to preserve the fine language and therefore pure thought of great drama was to read all the voices himself on a bare platform in the neutral ambience of a lecture hall. His aim was to stimulate the imagination of the public as readers. He seems to have gone back to a primitive and effective conception of the poet as reciter, a speaking book. The dramatic work of art has no business on the stage," he said. "The theatrical effect of a drama should go as far as making us want to see it performed: more than that destroys the artistic effect. The best performance is the one the reader makes for himself of the world of the drama." One ear-witness to Kraus as public reader was Elias Canetti, who describes the impact in his second volume of autobiography. That book is called, with evident gratitude, *Die Fackel im Ohr*.

One of the attractive features of Professor Grimstad's book is the amount of direct quotation from *Die Fackel*. The long extracts, given in German and in translation, mean that even those who have never heard of Kraus can taste him at his best and worst. Certainly this factual and argumentative study will appeal to a wider circle than students of Austro-German literature. Anyone interested in the stage should find here a source of discussion.

Grimstad doesn't hesitate to stop and trade punches with Kraus, and is especially hard on him for his habit of basing criticism on ethical criteria. Kraus is described as coming "close to absurdity" when he says fairy-tales don't have in them a meaning and that it is no concern of the critic whether the poet means anything. "The result of such a radically non-intentionalist critical position (if it were taken completely seriously) would have serious consequences for criticism. What would Kraus have thought of that sentence? Yes, to be deprived of justification for one's activity is a serious matter, but this is not in itself evidence that the intell's proposition is false: Art does in fact come close to absurdity. It makes manifest a meaning beyond knowledge."

"Why is man?" asks Büchner in *Woyzeck*. One answer might be in order to provide material for literary critics. Everybody knows the creative writer's intention should be to write works analysable in the aesthetic beliefs which Kraus, perverse as usual, believed this might not always be true. There is a marvellous article by him in *Die Fackel* about vaudeville and what he called "the knockabout". It reveals his feeling for the irrational in art values, and his journal in drainage, by contrast, the broad marshes of phraseology. Society was telling lies about itself, but he can tell the truth.

theatre. It disturbs by mirroring the great peculiarities of life. "The knockabout represents us all. His humour is without foundation, just as we ourselves are. He has effect without cause, just as we ourselves come from nowhere, in order to move on again."

Grimstad calls these remarks "extremely perceptive". They are. Kraus might be talking about a modern form of fairy-tale (*märchen*), an activity without apparent meaning which has power over us because we understand its meaning without knowing why. Kraus knew, in spite of his long insistence on the purity of ideas, that there is a sphere of creativity where the intellect is not visibly at work. "I am the master only of the language of others," he said. "My own does with me what it likes."

Nike Wagner sees in that remark evidence of the connection between ethical and erotic in Kraus. This is to give "erotic" a meaning it doesn't commonly have. *Geist und Geschlecht* elaborates the Viennese background of Kraus's activities between the 1890s and the outbreak of the 1914 war. It was natural that Kraus's attacks on the hypocrisy of society should have a sexual slant. It was in this area that double standards were most evident. But more interesting than his assault on male duplicity is the posture he had to adopt when faced with the current concept of femininity. He lived of course through the so-called modern movement in Austrian art. It might have been expected that Gustav Klimt and his *Sezession*, representing a revolt against traditional forms, would have received the support of *Die Fackel*. This did not happen. Kraus found himself in the embarrassing position of being on the side of society against the new tendency. He could allow the anarchist Erich Mühsam to appeal in *Die Fackel* for "crooks, tramps, whores and artists" to unite for a new form of culture. Nothing could be more anti-social than that. What he couldn't tolerate was the inclination of the new movement in art to soften boundaries and replace firm line with ornament.

Whether the learned *Investigations towards a Critique of Philosophical Judgement*, with which Plessner established his right to work on and of which the two later works in this volume are little more than summaries, will still interest Kant scholars, I do not know; but as a distillation of the intellectual obsessions of its time, it will empty reward the historian. Plessner had rejected the Marburg and Baden neo-Kantians, as well as Dilthey and Husserl, not in order to embrace the historical relativism of Spengler's

quaint. Whether the learned *Investigations towards a Critique of Philosophical Judgement*, with which Plessner established his right to work on and of which the two later works in this volume are little more than summaries, will still interest Kant scholars, I do not know; but as a distillation of the intellectual obsessions of its time, it will empty reward the historian. Plessner had rejected the Marburg and Baden neo-Kantians, as well as Dilthey and Husserl, not in order to embrace the historical relativism of Spengler's

brood, but certainly because he was convinced of the primacy of the practical. In his polemics against Plessner - as Kant's most plausible and dangerous rival in this endeavour - we may discern the deep anxiety which a rationalist must have felt in an age pregnant with renewed attempts to treat philosophy as "the world's means of existing", and praxis as "a primary of resolution over thought". The degeneration of logical form in the activity of life and the degradation of necessity into arbitrariness.

Logical form and its "analogue", freedom, are two of the chief concepts in Plessner's dialectic; freedom is seen, not as an "invisible freedom" source of action, but as the specific purposes; form (sometimes equated with the untranslatable word *charakter*) is a totality under the aspect of the unconditional. Plessner is impressed by the precarious status of philosophy in human culture, by the necessity of conceiving it as an ideal, even if only a *fictitious* ideal - and as a system, the subordination of which to the learning process guarantees morality against a shallow "master of wisdom, a pope".

The whole work is imbued with the intensity of the "New Sobriety", the pathos of objectivity. We get an expression to this in our "being" (*Haltung*), in a "unity" (*Einheit*) purpose. "Totalität" means *Zusammenstimmung* - "Weisheit" - what we are objective about matters much less. To Kant's faculty for the appreciation of beauty - Plessner postulates a philosophical counterpart, dignity - a definition of minimum of surrender - "betragslos" of Lüdendorff's "total war". I thought Plessner sees "objectivity" even in beauty, and thus as the true aesthetic potential - of *Sachlichkeit* - vulnerability to mere legality.

There is a lot of intricate material in this book about the problematic position of women in Vienna and the erotic in art and literature, about theoretical studies of sexuality which appeared at this time, with special consideration of Otto Weininger's influential book *Geschlecht und Charakter*, and on the work of investigators like Freud and Kraft-Ebing, Adolf Loos gets much attention. The discussion of Klimt is really excellent.

The great love of Kraus's life was

## Be practical

**Daniel Johnson**  
**HELMUTH PLESSNER**  
*Geist und Geschlecht*  
456pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. DM36.  
3 518 06523 8

"Consciousness of purity, upon which everything here depends... stands beyond all discussion." In 1920 one could still write like that: now the words are poisoned, the sentiments

## Family Holidays

The car got a sun-ban while my father worked in his compound... Mixed with the elcadas, you could hear the fecundity of his typog. under the green corrugated plastic roof.

My mother staggered about like a nude. In her sun-bat, high heels and bathog-costume. She was Quartermaster and Communications.

My doughy sisters baked on the stony beach, swelling out of their bikinis, turning over every half hour... Still, they were never done.

The little one fraternised with foreign children. Every day I swam further out of my depth, but always, miserably, got back to safety.

Michael Hofmann

## A reformer in the raw

Patrice Higonnet

**GUY CHAUSSINAND-NOGARET**  
Mirabeau  
Paris: Seuil. 70fr.

Imagining a young man, barely out of his teens, the child of a broken home, thrown in prison at his father's bidding, detested by his mother who had murdered him, beloved of his sister who had slept with him, scornful, oversexed, and marked by smallpox. Clockwork Orange? The Manson family? One of Ronald Reagan's *bêtes noires*, forever a burden to honest white folks? No, Gabriel Honoré Riquetti de Tournay-Buffière de Mirabeau, a distant cousin of the Marquis de Sade, and the husband of Provence's most eligible heiress.

Sticking icky, a powerful and gifted orator, the man seethed with vitality. For those who like the raw-cooked approach to life, he was the raw, with Danton, to the cooked of Necker or Saint-Just and the overcooked of Robespierre. Mirabeau's *Letters to Sophie*, his seventeen-year-old mistress, the bride of a septuagenarian who had married her to spite his daughter, were in Guy Chausinand-Nogaret's words, "un des plus beaux romans d'amour du 18e siècle", as well they might be since a number of them were lifted from Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. No genre was foreign to his pen; Mirabeau wrote a great deal: more than ten volumes' worth of love letters, pamphlets, erotic brochures which Baudelaire later read with interest, and proposals for many more of reforms.

Writing and reforms were in fact hereditary vices for him, since Mirabeau was the son of the Marquis de Mirabeau, the self-styled "Aml des hommes", a familial ogre who may have been a physiocratic friend of mankind, but who was his wife's and children's worst enemy. Mirabeau père, though fiercely devoted to the

maintenance of his seigneurial and patriarchal rights, had set great store by his reputation in the Republic of Letters; and so did, *mutatis mutandis*, Mirabeau fils; disinherited and destitute, the younger man had to settle for a niche in Grub Street, but he was proud of this side of his life and he taunted his unappreciative compatriots by pointing out that in England, where he had lived for some time, great politicians did not disdain occasionally to become journalists.

To journalism in the 1770s, Mirabeau added finance in the 1780s, when he fell in with the Swiss money-men in Paris, Panchoaud and Clavière, the future Girondin minister of finance. It was then also that he befriended other members of his future brains trust, the Genevan Dumont, as well as Talleyrand, Brissot, and Narbonne, the illegitimate son of Louis XV and the future lover of Mme de Staël. Mirabeau needed money in those days, and he did not hesitate to sell his pen, to Calonne among others, the Comptroller General of Finance, who hired him to spread nasty rumours about some private shares whose competition was driving down the value of government bonds. Mirabeau proved surprisingly effective. His "mirabelleries", as Beaumarchais called them, drove the share prices down, much to the dismay of Calonne who had been secretly buying them all along, and who wisely decided at this point to send Mirabeau off on a mission to Berlin. It was there that Mirabeau took up the cause of German Jews and perspicaciously analysed the problems of the Frederician state, which he aptly described as an army with a country rather than a country with an army. On the eve of the French Revolution, Mirabeau was notorious (his biographer describes him as a "fornicateur olympique"), well connected, hopelessly in debt, fed up with poverty, and determined to get his share of the forthcoming "Grande Bouffe Nationale et Révolutionnaire".

To achieve this end, Mirabeau had to become the spokesman of a

platform, namely the reform and rationalization of institutions: the abolition of feudalism in its various seigneurial and judicial forms; the defence of the rights of individuals; combined with the defence of a strong monarchic executive. Mirabeau's motive in assembling this programme is a moot point which greatly concerns Chausinand-Nogaret. On the one hand, it can be considered a duplicitous situation as a *déclassé* aristocrat, a man who craved a governmental role, but who needed the support of the Third Estate to become *ministre*. Mirabeau is a suspicious character, and Michelet, who approved of him in some ways, none the less concluded that the tribune was the kind of man who could be counted on to prefer "une femme à la patrie". But Chausinand-Nogaret strongly disagrees. Mirabeau's drift from the adamant defence of his family's feudal prerogative in 1771 to his denunciation of nobility in his pamphlet against the Cincinnati in 1785 is, in his view, the conclusion of "trial and reflexion" and of his long imprisonment by arbitrary royal and paternal writ. Far from being an opportunistic play, Mirabeau's programme was deeply felt; and it is quite reasonably presented here as a viable liberal-conservative compromise, with nation-wide resonance.

Chausinand-Nogaret is fascinated by his subject as a personality, but the book is also a serious work of history which must be placed in the context of the continuing debate on the causes of the French Revolution. Two camps are at odds here, Small-Endians and Big-Endians. The Small-Endians are the Marxists, faithful still to the Old Cause, whose the French Revolution as a class struggle between a progressive bourgeoisie and an isolated reactionary aristocracy, unreasonably reluctant to settle for the dust-bin of history. The Big-Endians, it will be remembered, are often former members of the CP, now converted to "pluralism", who maintain that the bourgeois-versus-noble distinction had

become by 1789 largely anachronistic and irrelevant to politics. The French Revolution, they say, did not oppose class to class (and what is a class anyway?). It was instead about "the people" versus a broad Whiggish and established bourgeoisie-cum-noble elite, a natural, propertied social grouping which after 1791 somehow fell to pieces, the nature of that sad decline being the subject of *Penser la Révolution*, a provocative essay by François Furet, the leading revisionist historian whom Chausinand-Nogaret admires and frequently cites in these pages.

Mirabeau, obviously, is the ideal "pluralist" subject for a historian like Chausinand-Nogaret, who ends his book with a ringing political invocation to liberty, Mirabeau's "maître à exiger et à sublimer". With great care and skill, he follows Mirabeau's middle course in 1789-91, and his stand for the abolition of tithes, for the printing of *assignats*, for the tricolour flag (Mirabeau understood the value of symbols) but also for the defence of the monarch's right of veto and of declaring war. Chausinand-Nogaret also explains why it was that in May 1790, Mirabeau began to take the king's money, large amounts of it, in fact, money which he used recklessly and conspicuously. Such a pension, we are told, was quite in the order of things: after all, Louis couldn't very well acknowledge Mirabeau's help by appointing an ex-pornographer to royal office. The king, it seems, had no choice but to give him money, and Mirabeau had no choice but to take it.

Chausinand-Nogaret's most successful pages are those where he develops the argument of his book on the pre-revolutionary nobility published six years ago. He carefully distinguishes between aristocratic coteries - reactionary, corrupt, uncaring - and the larger mass of the nobility, won over to the Enlightenment, liberal, and *bourgeois*. He is right in saying that Mirabeau's election by the Third

Estate was not a fluke, and right also in asserting that the deputies who met at Versailles in May 1789 were not rebels, but "le tout-Etat monarchique", men whose agreement in the need for reform was "le plus élatant symptôme de la totale décomposition de l'absolutisme".

Where the book is less convincing (though given the state of the art it must be emphatically pointed out that judgments here are hopelessly subjective), is in the suggestion that Mirabeau's middle course, however sincerely felt, had any hope of success. Furet's argument, derived in part from Augustin Cochin, is that the logic of the bourgeoisie's ideology inevitably led to the decay of a liberal monarchic view. Albert Soboul and the Marxists agree, if for very different reasons: for them, it was the logic of class struggle, of modern capitalism versus corporatist agrarianism, which inevitably sapped the social alliance on which Mirabeau relied. In any case, his prospects were decidedly unpromising when he died just in time, at the age of forty-two, in April 1791, three months or so before Louis's flight to Varennes. Mirabeau himself had urged the king to leave Paris, but openly, and for Rouen, to fight a civil war if need be, but on his own terms, rather than on those of the foreign monarchs towards whom Louis was fleeing when he was caught in eastern France. On his death-bed, Mirabeau confided to Cabanis that he would proclaim a Republic if Louis simply ran away, and one cannot help but wonder what Mirabeau would in fact have done after Varennes. Would he have been able to convince his erstwhile foes Lafayette and Barnave to stabilize the political system as a "proclaimed Republic"? History does indeed "vocalise" from time to time, as Chausinand-Nogaret suggests, and Mirabeau might have imposed another course. But in the end, it was Robespierre, "Sea-Green" as Carlyle called him, who got the better of Danton, and for all his force and presence, Mirabeau, I expect, would not have fared much better.

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Oxford University Press will be at Grand MG01, Halle 5, and visitors will be very welcome.







limited field more solemnly, and with the sensible precaution of taking his literary subjects one by one. He also sub-divides his chapters into little head-lined chunks so that there is no possible doubt in the reader's mind as to what is afoot. But Martin's literary balance in the face of the tidal wave of what he takes to be Wagner's influence is less secure than Furness's and he constantly mistakes superficial reference for real engagement, intention for achievement, and the common currency of late Romantic cliché for the stamp of Wagner's unique creative genius. Several of the enclaves and shorter chapters could have been dispensed with altogether. Swinburne and Wilde in different ways made use of Wagnerian allusion as part of the apparatus of sentimental decadence but their relation to him is not much closer than that of a couple of luxury yachts in a battleship that happens to have preceded them over the same stretch of ocean. Yeats's place in the book is justified by even less. As Martin admits, Yeats was unusually resistant to the whole Wagner phenomenon. Parallels between him and Wagner are no more than parallels: lines which never meet. Again, they sailed the same sea.

Both were Romantics of the most passionate type, both lifelong

seekers after the lyric, and both aspirants to the creation of a new religion based on the oldest standards of nobility of their races. Both lived their lives in symbiotic relation to their art, and conceived of that art as the battleground for the spiritual struggles of their souls.

This, and there is much more, merely describes a lowest common denominator; the first sentence is not quite true of Wagner and the second is true of practically all artists since the French Revolution.

The chapters on Symonds and Moore are more successful. Symonds at least had a real critical grip on Wagner's work, though it would be reassuring to feel that Martin had noticed how very bad the Wagnerian novels and poems in question are. The Shaw chapter is hampered by oversimplification of the complex relationship of ideas between Schopenhauer, Wagner and Nietzsche, and of other issues also: "Shaw gave lengthy metaphysical speeches on the subject of his central idea, aims of a kind, to his Tanners and Cescars and other principle spokesmen, in a manner which certainly bears relation to Wagner's technique with Wotan." The differences between Wotan's intensely dramatic musings and the

lectures of Shaw's characters are surely far more striking than their similarities. The real meat of the book, however, is contained in the three long chapters on Joyce, Lawrence and *The Waste Land*. Of these the Joyce chapter is the best, although much of it is not new and the claimed Wagner echoes in the Celtic twilight poems of *Chamber Music* are yet more period clichés. The Lawrence chapter attributes to Wagner much of what is really Nietzschean in Lawrence, and forces the material into neat patterns which seriously distort its true nature. "Nietzsche, Wagner and Lawrence all had a Mediterranean side which coexisted with the Germanic values with which they are more usually identified. All three spent most of their lives in opposition to the religion of the South, but all three returned to the Christ-myth in their final works." It is hard to imagine a reader for whom this sentence would contain useful information. The quoted lists of the opposing characteristics of "Western liberalism" and "Heretic vitalism," and "Western tradition" and "New German paganism" tell one something about Lawrence and fascism, but, in direct contradiction to Martin's intention, show how far Wagner was from both. Most of Wagner's own ideas appear on the "Western" lists.

The book's last and longest chapter sets out to demonstrate that *The Waste Land* is "a synthesis and logical endpoint to a Wagnerian tradition, roughly the one outlined in the preceding chapters. The specific goal is to suggest how the poem might be read as a version of *Parzifal*." This thesis is untenable and Martin is out of his depth in the presentation of it. Wagner and Eliot have as little in common as it is possible for two major artists to have whose lifetimes almost overlap. The detailed comparison collapses on inspection: Kundry, for instance, is not like any, still less all, of the women in *The Waste Land*; "the third who walks always beside you" does not "bring to mind Gurnemanz and Kundry ascending to Monsalvat with the mysterious monk-robed third who later reveals himself to be *der Erlöser*" (*Parzifal* at this point is an unnamed knight and Gurnemanz and Kundry know perfectly well who he is); and Gurnemanz and Eliot's Tiresias have nothing of substance in common. More importantly, the whole atmosphere of *The Waste Land*, bitter, disjointed, sharply redolent of the place and time in which it was written, is in profound (and rebellious) contrast to the seamless autumnal completeness of *Parzifal*. Above all, the "Wagnerian tradition" on which the theory is built is

not a tradition at all but a quicksand of allusion and period coincidence.

There are several howlers in Martin's book. Schopenhauer's name was Arthur, not Arnold; Madame Sosostis is thus spelled; Wagner had abandoned *Jesus of Nazareth* and *The Vectors* long before his death; the costumes and scenery of the Bayreuth *Parzifal* were never brought to Covent Garden. These mistakes are insignificant; less so is Dr Martin's assumption that *Aufklärung* is the correct term for the Romantic movement in Germany.

These two books provide, as do many others, some of which are quoted here, depressing evidence that old Kluge is still casting his spell, with numbing, the critical faculties of commentators who regard him with a stunned mixture of awe and distaste. The complicated question of theme and quality of Wagner's influence on literature cannot be answered without both an exact appreciation of what Wagner himself created and a steady, clear and careful application of literary judgment to a large mass of material some of which may be more or less Wagnerian in mood or reference or method or aspiration. It is not an easy task but it is time the smoke lifted, at least from the auditorium.

book is dazzling and precocious, and is fair to say that after several decades of intense analytical work, the discipline of philosophical psychology has only begun to pull abreast of Nietzsche's thought.

Through the prodigious editing of Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Nietzsche's texts are as established as they are ever likely to be. And from a perspective of transmitting his English with as much clarity as the prose allows, R. J. Hollingdale's translation can hardly be bettered. Yet the staid, impudic, almost academically cool language of the translation filters out, as inevitably must, the marvellous writing of the original. So one will miss the sudden shifts of rhythm and tone, and at one moment lyrical and at the next, the sweeping playfulness, the infamy, mock distance, the whispers, the jests, sneers, jokes, and the abrupt, unanticipated kills. Nietzsche as a writer was like some gifted and intuitive lover, so perhaps there should be room for an implied reconstitution of the feeling of the text in a different language.

But there is another sense in which the quiet of Mr Hollingdale's rendering is very suited to the book. It is put together at a quiet moment in Nietzsche's life. "The whole book," he wrote later, "contains no noisy word, no attack, no spite. It lies in the sun, sound, happy like some sea animal basking on the rocks." For something finally so inhumanly, it is sunny book, and Nietzsche described that way at 553: "Whither does this whole philosophy with all its circuitous paths, want to go? Does it do more than translate as it were into reason a strong and constant drive I drive for gentle sunlight, bright buoyant air, southern vegetation; the breath of the sea...?" It was a time when the idiosyncrasy was mothering still tender, did not yet show the signs of power that would tear him along with them towards their terrible destiny, and intervened just when his history was about to take them up and put them to use, undreamt of as he clamoured, "I am still, over the sea-rocks near Capri on his endless hopeful walks - what he still could write to Gast." Nothing has happened to anyone because of Nietzsche's given me any thought.

Two more volumes in a series of illustrated documentary studies of great composers have appeared: Mendelssohn - *His Life and Times* by Mozella Moshansky (144pp; Macmillan, £12.95); and Schubert - *His Life and Times* by Tim Dowley (150pp; Macmillan, £12.95). Both are excellent. Written for the general reader, the biographies concentrate on the composers' personal lives and their many extracts from letters and diaries. Each book is copiously illustrated in black and white.

## FICTION

## For the love of it

## Valentine Cunningham

LAURA RIDING

Progress of Stories  
380pp. Manchester: Carcanet New Press. £7.95.  
0 85635 402 3

Riding? Gottschalk? (Riding) Jackson? The blurb over how she is to be known nicely reflects the strident confusions that are mangled in and about her fictions. "The key to Story", asserts Laura Jackson in an explanatory note at the end of this new gathering of Riding and Jackson writings (mainly a reprint of the 1935 *Progress of Stories* with other pieces and a new preface added). "The key to Story is boundless sympathy with the immensely varied actualities of life." Story is "extraordinarily live"; it is "the next best thing to truth - when it is formed with love of it for its capability of feigning likeness to life". Sympathy, love, immense variety, actualness, feigning, likeness to life: they're admirable, amiable sentiments, traditional ones too, of just the sort - but the turgidly bound-up way they're put - that Mrs Murdoch and the gang of literary, anti-modernist novel-readers trailing in her wake might be tempted to rush in to endorse. But they'd be quite mistaken. For these late reflections on what story is touch Mrs Riding's and Mrs Jackson's fictions, as represented in this volume, in almost no particular whatsoever.

It is utterly characteristic that they crop up next to a wispish spuming of some unbecomely company a couple of her stories, "Eve's Side of It" and "In the End", had fallen into the pages of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Mrs Jackson won't stand for her stuff being absorbed "into the raucous favor of current feminist narrative". So much, then, for any beautiful sympathy with the immensely varied ways in which stories, let alone life, may be read.

But then, this volume is dedicated to a pair of friends "Who know how to read this book right", gratifying but, it soon becomes clear, rare escapes from what's called "the inveterate manner of readers of reading as they pleased and not as they were supposed to read". You have to see things, in other words, precisely Laura's way.

If you fail to, you're met not by dignified silence nor even by anything much resembling a persuasive argument, but rather by truculent amazement that anyone should miss the point or the merits of the story in question. In a discussion of "Christmas Eve" in this volume's preface, we are told that "I" was moved to write it as a little and-of-year Christmas gift for a few friends, and I have since made a few presentations of it. In none of the responses that I received was there any manifestation of the quality I have described as, in my experience as a writer and reader of stories, a reader and writer of stories, "story-nature". Nevertheless it is included here, "under the persuasion of its having an outstanding purity of story-motivation". After all, as Laura Riding puts it defiantly at the end of her odd homage to fairy, "A Crown for Hans Andersen", authors spend a lot of time "befreeing the wrong people, which means in turn that one is neglecting that right people. For, of course, there are right people? I mean, does one not owe it to the general situation to behave as if, undoubtedly, yes? And, sure enough, right readers eventually turn up to prove her right. Even as she composes her new Preface, the story is at hand. "Just the other day I made a fresh presentation of the story to a pair of friends, and there came swiftly - the next event - a response of pleasure felt. Have times been changing? I have seen no signs of it. But two, and myself for a starter, project a line of possibility of infinite extension. Solipsism on this scale evidently needs little by way of reassurance.

Certainly it takes more than a lot of self-indulgent readers to pierce the thick skin of such undaunted confidence. As ever (and one thinks of the dull wastes of the little-magazine *Epiphany* in the 1930s), authorial conceit stamps all over any quibble. Laura (Riding) Jackson unrepentantly endorses Laura Riding's boasts about her stories' merits by unblushingly reprinting and augmenting them. Like her earlier self, she presumes that even her most opaque bits of critical thought and afterthought are welcome ("I cannot think that this later view of the story would be other than helpful to readers of it, it having been helpful to me in my understanding of it"). Nor has she grown any less contemptuous towards readers who, discovering her "important" material to be obscure, merely demonstrate thereby that "their attention is not equal to the requirements".

What is required, apparently, is an attention that will rate a hit-or-miss intellectualism verging on the bogus as the credible portentousness it wishes it were ("My story is not, you see, a simple fancy - or a simple anything"). That attention must smile on a cheap libel of haunting paradox as if it were complex thinking. It must be ready to condone the mimicry of "The Playground", the dumbly Gothic plotting that sustains her picaresque "Three Times Round", the quest for the significances of fairy-tale that normally collapses into dismaying childishness. It must also, grant

high originality to the investment in a jazz-modern, café-culture mode ("The Secret") that stays stubbornly sub-Brecht, sub-Auden, as well as to the damp fizzle of her Arthurian re-reading in "A Crown for Hans Andersen". The most striking aspect now of the original 1935 preface is its extended but wobbly attempt to repeat the casual authority of Virginia Woolf's critical tones ("You try to think. What a nice party: but you cannot help feeling dissatisfied... No, it is no good unless it is all the same conversation. In a little while it will be all the same conversation. And all we can do about it, having got so far, is to be careful of accidents".)

No, Laura Riding was never a reliable commentator on her own writing's ways, and Laura (Riding) Jackson doesn't appear to have advanced much further in the paths of critical self-knowledge. These stories have "no least ulterior purpose of a telling", insists the 1982 preface, forgetful perhaps of the propagandistic purpose to which the story, "Socialist Pleasures" ("Another Socialist pleasure was winning arguments") was quite naturally put in the sad Laura Riding-Harry Kemp volume *The Left Heresy in Literature and Life* (1939).

The author's loud suspicions of "feminist analysis" cannot alter these stories' repeated note of woman's plight and woman's aggressive childishness. It must also, grant

neighbour's poodle; subsequently, she realizes that both dog and the neighbours are closer to Porter's affections than she is. Early in the marriage, she neglects their "dovecote" apartment and establishes herself as a school librarian while Porter fights in the Second World War. She distances herself further (and fatally) from him in a drunken outburst - Mrs Lamarche doesn't usually drink - after his fiftieth birthday party. Her efforts to reconcile liberal, "dining out" attitudes with the unsexed that she feels in the presence of new generations of black, brown and yellow children who frequent the school library are no more convincing than the tolerant façade that she presents to Porter's *nouveau riche* and Jewish friends.

The narrative moves swiftly from vignette to vignette, and these are linked, on the whole without clumsiness, by Mrs Lamarche's inexhaustible appetite for cliché together with Porter's dry, but not unloving, ripostes. In one of her period stabs at self-revelation, she contemplates autobiography and tries to engage her husband's attention:

"As of this writing, my little effort opens with one of the loveliest lines in the language" - "What's that?" he said. "I wandered lonely, as a cloud", she said. "You wandered?" Porter said. "Lonely as a cloud?" She waited. He went to the hall closet,

took out his hat and turned. "Where did you go?" said Porter.

Feminism, espoused with the same determination with which she has previously mastered ballroom dancing, does as little for her psyche as a new wardrobe or a home nurse. Possibly, a child (which would undoubtedly have saved the marriage) might have drawn her from her self-absorption. But after it becomes clear that they will never have the child that Porter has longed for and Mrs Lamarche has, dutifully, been prepared to provide, Porter, though still polite and attentive to her physical well-being, transfers his affections at first to a collection of indoor plants, then to a young widow and her two children.

He dies suddenly at his desk, and an extended period of mourning, in which Mrs Lamarche feels that she has finally possessed him and can be seen to have done so, carries her fairly close to fulfillment. Her righteous widowhood is ruined when his executors make known to her not only that he had intended to retire to the West Indies with the young mother and her children, but also that the liaison has had the approval of Porter's wide circle of friends. Behind a painstakingly constructed barrier of spirited truisms, her confusion remains inviolate to the end. Verbal attack has always been her best method of defence; wholly misunderstood and humiliated, she is soon able to isolate herself completely.

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# Boldness on the bench

Neil MacCormick

LORD DENNING

What Next in the Law  
352pp. Butterworth. £5.95.  
0 406 176027

This will no doubt find a place in legal history as the book which finally led to the resignation of the judge who had "all the Christian virtues except that of resignation". Perhaps indeed a reviewer having the good fortune to possess a copy of the original unexpurgated version will find it in due course a collector's piece. One cannot but regret the manner of ending of Lord Denning's brilliant, erratic and tempestuous career as Master of the Rolls; but one cannot doubt that the publication of the book and the reaction it rightly and predictably provoked among the black communities and particularly the jurors assailed in one section of it made imperative his author's decision to retire.

Leave aside the passage which provoked the particular storm; leave aside, that is, the disparaging comment upon the composition of the jury in the trial arising from the riot in St Paul's, Bristol, and upon its failure to reach a verdict; even without that particular passage, the book as a whole may well seem to exceed by some way the limits of propriety for a serving judge. It is shot through with a zeal for reform (or at least change) in the law which makes it seem at places almost like incitement to litigation. For example, in discussing the possible breaches of the law to protect breaches of privacy, Lord Denning expresses himself as being all in favour of leaving such a development, desirable in his view, to the judges. The judges, he

says, "should develop the law according to the needs of the times. They should be among the bold spirits." At the same time, he recognizes the difficulties of leaving law reform to the courts: "It depends on whether the facts give rise to a point for discussion. It depends on whether the client or the lawyer will take it up."

Indeed it depends on these things. But one wonders how far a serving judge should go, prior to hearing argument, in the way of indicating what lines may be worth trying on in litigation. Right across the broad canvas of the present book, from the critique of modern jury trials, through legal aid, litigation involving personal injuries, libel, privacy and breach of confidence, the great Bill of Rights controversy, to the concluding section on misuse of power (by Ministers, public authorities and trades unions, of course), Denning is worth like to see about the changes he would like to see and about the defects of the present law. And so all along, not for the first time in his career, he provokes one to wondering how far a judge - a serving judge - should go. How far should a judge declare his own hand in advance as to the changes he will favour when the accidents of litigation bring an opportunity for change his way? How far should an appellate judge go in spotlighting issues he would welcome the opportunity to take up on appeal from the more hidebound courts below?

There seem to me two grounds for doubting whether judges should show too plain a hand in these matters. First, from the angle of the litigant, law reform by judicial decision is an expensive way to proceed. As a matter of justice, it is not obviously right or fair that private purses bear the cost of public benefits. That objection might be met if legal aid were provided for both parties in test cases on points of

law. But then what a floodgate to litigation would one throw open, vesting how much discretion in the administrators of the legal aid fund? Anyway, Denning himself is in the present book highly critical of the expense and unfairness already built into the legal aid scheme.

Secondly, one has to face up to the constitutional question. What ought to be the balance of law-developing responsibility as between elected legislature (or, in truth, as Denning points out, government) and non-elected judiciary in such as our contemporary circumstances? No one doubts, or anyway no one should doubt, that under guidance of established or evolving legal principles the judges both must and do develop the law interstitially, and that in doing so they must have recourse to some conceptions of justice of common sense and of sound public policy. But there are proper limits to this, imposed as much as anything else by the restricted capacity of the litigious process to present or to test and weigh evidence on general social issues as distinct from particular issues of fact.

Certainly, among the distinguishing - probably one should say "distinguishing" - marks of Denning's judicial career has been a readiness to push beyond the commonly accepted limits of the judicial role. Sometimes, as in his contributions to contract law or the law of negligent misstatement, he has re-established neglected principles of good faith at the expense of legal technicalities, and has prevailed in the long run despite initial resistance to his audacity. But often, as he candidly acknowledges in the present book, he has been called to order by the House of Lords, a tribunal which he only briefly graced in his passage from membership to presidency of the Court of Appeal.

With all the respect due to one of the most remarkable judges in the history of English law, I must say that I have never discerned in Denning's judicial or extrajudicial utterances any clear view of the principles which distinguish the fields legitimately open to judicial development from those properly to the legislature's responsibility. Almost, it seems, as though the governing test is and is only the *ad hoc* judicial intuition of right and justice. Yet that seems insufficient in itself. (One might contrast here Lord Reid, whose sense of justice was as sharp as

most, but who also articulated in his career a set of governing principles on the limits of the judicial function.)

Apart from all else, judges' intuitions of justice do not always and necessarily coincide; the less so, the more *ad hoc* they are. So "what seems just" will be an uncertain guide in delimiting the field of judicial intervention. The less uncertain, it might be counter-objectioned, if judges do, like Denning, write down candidly the injuries they see in the current law. Then we will all know where we stand. Well and good; but in what detail, one may wish to know? If such as I, one might end up with a great series of judicial manifestoes, each declaring a favoured programme of law reform through litigation.

And there is the rub, there the constitutional problem about the kind of literary freedom we should wish serving judges to exercise. The point was in fact made by Denning in his judgment, quoted in the present book, in the case where the question was raised whether an article in *Punch* by the then Mr Quintin Hogg was sufficiently scurrilous in its criticism of the Court of Appeal to merit condemnation as contempt of court. Said Denning: "We cannot enter into public controversy. Still less into political controversy. We must rely on our conduct itself to be its own vindication."

The power of criticism which a great and long-experienced judge can bring to bear on the law is almost beyond estimation. It is an important public service if he can give of that experience in mounting such criticism. But to do so is to enter the field of controversy, political controversy at that. The time for giving this service is surely after, not during, active service on the judicial front.

As for his Lordship's particular criticisms of present law, a few scattered observations must suffice to complete this review. On the jury: one is always startled by the remarkable insularity of English law. There may doubt about the workings of the present jury system, now that every citizen is eligible for jury service. But is the right answer to re-introduce highly selective jury service, with jurors selected as magistrates are? Would there not be a better case for retaining trial by one's peers, but under the

Scottish system of a fifteen-person jury, with a simple majority verdict? With a simple majority verdict, the qualified majority verdict, published in 1967, when England introduced a leader in introducing over this degree of apparent total ignorance of that law, the majority principle. At least, the comparative and sociological investigations of how juries actually work within the two jurisdictions - yet the judges have always evinced great suspicion of such work. As for legal aid, too, surely share Lord Denning's view with those who are caught in the middle of the present legal aid system, too well-off to get legal aid, too poor to litigate, and at risk of being hounded by a costly battle in defence against legally aided party who has nothing to lose. As for personal injuries litigation and confidentiality, Denning is on the side of the angels, that is of reviewer's intuitions. In particular, advocacy of a defence of "information on a matter of public interest" is surely a much needed protector of press freedom, and a useful potential counter-weight to abuse of rights against defamation, breach of privacy or of confidence.

Finally, on the Bill of Rights questions: English and Scottish law alike have in effect been preserved from contributing to the development of a European jurisprudence of rights. In the regular flow of applications to the Human Rights Commission, British judges have contributed next to nothing to the sound and proper interpretation of the European Convention. It falls to surprise me when British judges nevertheless argue against making Convention directly justiciable in Lord Denning here adds his voice to that surprising argument.

On this as other points his argument has a strikingly intuitionist flavour. Just as H. A. Pritchard thought that moral philosophy was based on a mistake since there was nothing to discuss about moral issues once moral intuition had revealed the answer, so one may suspect that Lord Denning would hold legal philosophy to be based on the analogous mistake. But one could at least be confident that his fair-mindedness would be in no way a mistaken reviewer's mislenses.

## Top people's papers

Michael Davie

MARTIN WALKER

Powers of the Press: The World's Great Newspapers

400pp. Quartet Books. £15.  
0 7043 2271 4

Newspapers almost everywhere are in trouble - bankrupt, closing, merging, suppressed - but books and "critical studies" about them proliferate, like colts on a bomb site.

Few of these works amount to much. No regular critic of newspapers has replaced the late A. J. Liebling of the *New Yorker*. Academic studies of these days are often undertaken for political motives, to expose the imperfections of the press and its bias, and reach conclusions that surprise no one. In the United States, best-sellers have been written by journalists, describing how their papers work; but they have rarely risen above the level of gossip.

Historians of particular publications have usually lacked candour, though a recent history of the 150-year-old *Sydney Morning Herald*, whose author was given the run of the archives and complete freedom to write what he thought fit, has set a new standard both of readability and frankness. The central question of the power and influence of newspapers, however, remains obscure.

Martin Walker, a member of the staff of *The Guardian*, has had the idea of assembling twelve biographies of "the world's great newspapers". His selection consists of *The Times*; *Le Monde*; *Die Welt*; *Corriere della Sera*; *Pravda*; *Al-Ahram*; *Asahi Shimbun*; *Prova*; *Diary*; *La Repubblica*; *El Financiero*; *El Comercio*; and *El Mundo*.

These papers, we are told, form an élite, in whose hands is the "cultural authority" of the media in the West. "They are the house magazines, the daily shared experience, of their nations' ruling classes." They are perceived, Walker writes, "in some fundamentally important way, to be reflecting the concerns and ideas of the establishments, if not the governments, in the societies where they are based."

Walker is a romantic. Even *The Times* is no longer the house magazine of the British ruling class; if it were, Rupert Murdoch would find it easier to attract advertisements. The establishments of Houston or Los Angeles would be surprised to learn that their concerns and ideas were perceived by anyone to be reflected in the columns of the *Washington Post*. *The Age* of Melbourne is scarcely part of the shaded daily experience of the Queensland ruling class, unless they consult it for the Moonee Valley racing results.

Another weakness in Walker's thesis appears: one which he does not try to hide. He could, he states, have written a similar book about twelve quite different, but not inferior papers. Some of the best newspapers in the business are not described in this book, including *The Guardian*, which Walker loyally considers "the finest newspaper in the world". No Latin American paper is among the twelve. *Prova* is not a newspaper at all - just

alone a "great" newspaper - is the *Washington Post*; the *Toronto Globe and Mail*; *The Age* of Melbourne; and the *Rand Daily Mail*. He relates their histories, characterizes them, and describes their performance in modern times.

Besides the biographies of the papers Walker introduces two other themes. He prints brief extracts from the newspaper's editorials days after the Second World War, and examines the paper's coverage of Iran over the decade up to the fall of the Shah. His conclusion is that "they failed to do their job well, and that their failure meant that the majority of the world's literate and interested citizens were kept seriously misinformed." He might have added that the *Sunday*, *Department* and the *Foreign Office* were similarly imperceptive. The papers come out of the examination moderately well: *The Age* and *Le Monde*.

Walker touches on important matters: the relation between the "great" papers and their local public élites; the ways in which the great papers need to change and the methods if the public is to be better informed on political issues. Unfortunately, he barely gives himself space to raise one topic before he is off to the next. He has made a few points. Mr Murdoch's paper in New York is the *New York Post*, not the *Daily News* (yet); sometimes he uses the word "edition" when he means "issue".

Most people interested in newspapers will learn from *Powers of the Press*. But the nature and extent of those powers remain as obscure as ever.

## 400 years on

Charles Hope

DAVID ROSAND (Editor)

Titian: His World and His Legacy  
349pp. Columbia University Press.  
£33.50.  
0 231 05300 2

Art historians, like concert promoters and the Post Office, are obsessed by anniversaries. It seems that the centenary of the birth or death of an artist can never be allowed to pass without a scholarly conference and a bulky record of the proceedings. When minor or unjustly neglected figures are involved this can be a valuable way of encouraging research and reassessment, but in the case of the major artists, who are after all constantly studied, the practice is less obviously useful. Even though it may be convenient to have fifty or so articles on a famous painter or sculptor easily accessible in a single volume, the circumstances of publication generally prevent any of the authors from taking account of the other contributions, as they might have done had these in the normal way appeared in learned journals. Moreover, speakers at such conferences are often invited on the strength of past work rather than current research, and their papers still have to be printed even if they add nothing new. Finally, although one of the main objects of the exercise, presumably, is to make available recent discoveries, it is often years before such commemorative volumes are actually published.

This is certainly the case with *Titian: His World and His Legacy*, which consists of seven papers given at a symposium held in New York in 1976 to mark the fourth centenary of the artist's death. But to a great degree the organizer, David Rosand, seems to have avoided the other pitfalls, mainly because the contributors were encouraged to speak on a broad range of topics related to sixteenth-century Venice, rather than confining themselves to the career of Titian himself. As a result, their conclusions scarcely need to be revised in the light of the mass of other publications resulting from the 1976 celebrations.

The only paper, in fact, which deals exclusively with Titian is by Rosand himself. It is concerned with critical

responses, mostly dating from the artist's lifetime, to the different phases of his career. The material is largely familiar, but it provides an effective introduction to the volume as a whole. This is followed by a useful survey by James Ackerman of architectural patronage in Venice and the Veneto. Few scholars will disagree with his concluding observations that the methods of social history that have been so effectively applied in this field would also benefit the study of painting and sculpture. Even though Douglas Lewis's earlier work suggests that he would be sympathetic to such an approach, his discussion here of Sansovino's career as a sculptor deals exclusively with questions of style; but it is an important contribution to the old debate about the impact of Mannerism in Venice.

The other paper of a strictly art-

historical character, by Julius Held, is on the influence of Titian on Rubens. Astonishingly, this subject has never been examined before in a comprehensive way. Held does not pretend to do full justice to his theme, but he provides a mass of valuable comments, which should in particular remind us that Rubens's attitude to Titian's mythological imagery was very different from that of many modern iconographers. The meaning of one of Titian's pictures is also the concern of Edward Lowinsky, who gives a long and wide-ranging analysis of the problematic canon performed by some of the figures in "The Andrians". I cannot say whether he is right in his interpretation of the musical score, but I find his reading of the composition less than convincing.

With Patricia Labalme's essay on Titian's friend, Pietro Aretino, we are



Jordaens' "Sting Bitch", which is reproduced from R.A. d'Hulst's Jacob Jordaens (Philip Wilson, Russell Colnaghi, Covent Garden, London WC2, £47.50, 0 85667 19 3), which was drawn during the period in which he assisted Rubens in the decoration of Philip IV of Spain's hunting lodge, the Torre de la Parada near Madrid.

## Piero's connections

John White

CARLO GINZBURG

Indagini su Piero: Il Battesimo, il ciclo di Arezzo, la Flagellazione di Urbino

110pp. Turin: Einaudi.

MARILYN ARONBERG LAVIN

Piero della Francesca's Baptism of Christ. With an Appendix by B. A. R. Carter

183pp. Yale University Press. £21.  
0 300 02619 6

Carlo Ginzburg is primarily a historian and argues in his preface with considerable cogency that an investigation of the commissioning of a work of art may often prove a surer guide to its dating than the discussion of its iconography and style. He then attempts to link Piero della Francesca's "Baptism of Christ" to the Council of Florence in 1439 and the death in that year of Ambrogio Traversari, the humanist Abbot-General of the Camaldulensian Order, who had laboured mightily in the attempt to reconcile the Western and the Eastern churches. In the case of the Arezzo frescoes, the putative connection with the Traversari circle of Arezzo humanists is embodied in the person of Giovanni Bacci, the son of Francesco, who had assigned the funds to enable

any more than there is in the case of Traversari. All this is solid stuff, however, in comparison with the threads by which the author seeks to connect Giovanni Bacci with Cardinal Bessarion, the Metropolitan of Nicaea, a figure fine enough to induce an attack of vertigo in a gossamer spider. If the further attempt to link Bessarion, through a series of portraits of varying degrees of credibility, to the figure on the left of the foreground group in the panel painting of Flagellation likewise arouses a degree of scepticism, the book is nevertheless packed with interesting information and hypotheses. By one of the more intriguing of these the hall in which the Flagellation is shown as taking place is linked with the Scala Santa and the Lateran.

Apart from the validity or otherwise of the varying theories which are put forward, the reader is immediately plunged into the world of academic close combat. The names of fellow art historians and historians are strewn across the page, losing of limb here or an eye there, or revealing medieval theories are exploded by Ginzburg's barrages, or called in aid to further some campaign.

Marion Aronberg Lavin's study of the Baptism is in many ways a very different kind of book; since it is directed very clearly at the general reader while also setting out to convince the specialist. In certain other respects, however, it raises very similar questions.

Lavin will have none of the conflation theory, seen by such as Carlo Ginzburg as central to Piero's productions, and

instead stays firmly in the camp of those who prefer to date the "Baptism of Christ" in the late 1450s or early 1460s, alongside the Flagellation. However, it must be said that the evidence brought forward to link the three angels to the Miracle at Cana and the wedding ceremony, fascinating as it is, will probably seem less than overwhelming in its probative value to the more sceptically-minded.

The placing of the painting in its local setting, most immediately in that of the surviving altarpiece of which it formed a part, and most excitingly in its connections with Borgo San Sepolcro, with Pienza and the Tiber and the Val di Nuccia, in which the town stands, is fascinating, though, when so much is given, it is slightly odd that the obvious connection between death and burial, and rebirth and baptism is omitted. Baptism represents the death of the unredeemed self and its rebirth in Christ, and throughout the Middle Ages baptiserials were regularly modelled on the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Since Piero's Baptism was designed for the town of San Sepolcro, or Holy Sepulchre, which was, as Lavin demonstrates, seen as the New Jerusalem, to have stressed this most straightforward association of ideas would have added a further dimension to a fascinating discussion. No less illuminating, however, is the emphasis placed, and rightly placed, on the miracle of the stopping of the Jordan, explaining Piero's curious treatment of the river, which must have puzzled many an enquiring but less knowledgeable observer.

What will be for many such admirers of the altarpiece a revealing initiation into the medieval system of literal,

introduced to the world of Venetian politics. She demonstrates very well how he established and maintained his position in the city, and in particular how he managed to protect himself in spite of scandals and the hostility of powerful princes. This is relevant to Titian too, of course; for he was no less adept than Aretino in dealing with foreign rulers, and, indeed, with the Venetian government. On more than one occasion he used his diplomatic skills on behalf of Aretino.

Perhaps most interesting of all is the contribution of Juergen Schulz, who discusses the houses of Titian, Aretino and Sansovino. This is a fascinating piece of social history, informative both about the way in which Venetians of the period lived, and about the class structure of the city. On one point, however, it is possible to correct his account. He quotes a nineteenth-century tradition that in the earlier part of his career Titian lived in the Calle Ca' Lippello near the Frati. Schulz himself is doubtful of the story's truth but is unable to identify the source. According to Gian Jacopo Fontana, writing in a Venetian newspaper, *Il Vagabondo*, on July 10, 1852, the idea originated with an eccentric priest named Vincenzo Zenler, who had a passion for identifying the houses of famous Venetians and marking them with marble plaques. Sometime in the first half of the nineteenth century sketches of limbs and a head were discovered in the house in question, and Zenler suggested that they were studies for Titian's "Assumption" in the Frati. These drawings, which were acquired by an unnamed Englishman, cannot be traced, but it seems inconceivable that Zenler's attribution was correct. Some indication of his reliability is provided by the fact that he later claimed, certainly wrongly, to have found Titian's death certificate in his own church of San Tomà. The plaque which he put on the house no longer exists, but several others, including one about Marco Polo, continue to mislead visitors to the city and perhaps also native Venetians.

Rosand has done a difficult job well. The quality of the essays in this volume is consistently high, and although the contributors were asked to write for a general audience, their papers will be read with interest by specialists too. The book is also handsomely produced, with a very generous selection of good illustrations.

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# The College Ghost

For Hugh Sinclair

At 11.25, after a college beam  
Designed to wish a retiring colleague well  
Who with a glass in one hand, a watch in the other  
Like the pieces of Alice's mushroom, sat and then rose  
To remind with smiling words why we shall miss him),

At that suspended hour of a summer night,  
Having made my few farewells, collected my gow,.  
My black tie carelessly telling the approximate time,  
The caret filling my toes, the toes my shoes  
And the shoes knowing more or less the way to go,

I left the smoking-room and paced the cloisters  
In the wrong direction, almost three sides where one  
Would do, to find the passage to take me safely  
To the only place where we regularly fall  
Utterly unconscious without rebuke or danger

And came at once upon the college ghost  
Loiling in a Gothic arch not far from the kitchen.  
It had a gross nonchalant air, pretending  
That it simply chanced to be there waiting for no one  
Particularly, picking its non-existent nails.

Its face was puffy and indistinct, the eyes  
Burnt holes, nose gone, the grin healthy  
But upside down. It wore a college scarf  
And a row of pens in its shroud like a coffin,  
Slouched in its window in a May Week pose.

It watched me as I approached and it made its greeting,  
Not deferent, not assertive, simply assuming  
Its right to expect me to stop, as though our notes  
Had crossed and whatever it was had there and then  
To ho satlad and some confusion straightened out.

The night was dark and winy as a cellar,  
Two only noises the clacking of the flagpole  
On St Swithun's tower and the thumping of my heart.  
But I wasn't surprised. I felt it was an encounter  
Fated at one or another time to occur.

I fingered the keys in my pocket, the inner and outer  
Circuits, comforting brass and heavy for turning  
The secret doors and great gates of the college,  
Fingered them as though they were amulets  
To keep at a distance the presence I found before me.

Behind and through it glared the broad green square  
Of the lawn where all that summer afternoon  
In various attitudes of conversation  
Undergraduates had sat with early tea  
Outstepping the lingering remains of luncheon

And the voice of the shapeless shape, if voice it was,  
Drifted towards me softly, catching my ear  
Exactly like a carefully-placed loudspeaker,  
And its words were the words of all who had sat on that lawn  
Through similar afternoons until such darkness fell:

"Though I am not often seen here, at least at times  
When troublesome tasks last through daylight or take  
You from page to page of assorted memoranda,  
Nose down like a broker or a winded traveller  
Fretful for the last train in a foreign city,

"Though I am discreet and uncorroborated  
As a reputation embarrassing as the memory  
Of insufficient words at parties, feared  
Like a summons for a forgotten misdemeanour,  
Still, I do appear, and appear to you now.

"It's precisely at times like this, when you are distracted  
By well-being and owl-light from shutting your senses  
To what I represent and am ready to communicate  
That I eagerly seize my chance to materialize  
Like an image on paper in a padded tray.

"You reckon you can shortly make your escape,  
Say more next time. So be it. That is your manner.  
But for the moment, stay. I have something to tell you.  
That has been keeping but will not keep for ever,  
Like Gilgamesh's stone or a Pomerol, but not so nice.

"It concerns the conspiracy to keep me partly asleep  
With promise of distinct pleasures belonging to  
The forms of success towards which you propelled me,  
Wise like an elder framing a constitution  
Before he retires and dies a powerless legend.

"You gave me much that could not shame the giver  
Whatever whoops of joy and sounds of breakage  
Greeted your smiles, fond as a distant uncle,  
When the package was ripped open, the contents spilled,  
The crucial instructions immediately lost.

"But grammar burned bishops and nations fell to the prim.  
I negotiated the quantities of blood required  
To put into effect the decrees of the Ineffable.  
I argued over heads that I knew were soon  
To lose all interest in what they commanded.

"I was present when the planet first took its header  
Into the bracing hilly of the Impermanent.  
I dignified the scribbled with the spacing of nuts and muttoms.  
I bowed in Washington, once the place was loventad.  
Through me the Greeks discovered Australia.

"Theories of diet dispersed tribes, infections  
Accompanied stately truths like interpreters.  
I took your towers for wit, your lawns for sorrow,  
And made the Glondships that reduced brown acres  
Of imposing mahogany to the space of a handclasp.

"Even when the world in a more appealing tongue  
Spoke of the price to be paid for a share of power,  
It was to you I referred with a slight shrug  
And perhaps a mock self-deprecatory grin  
That could not decide if it cared for your approval.

"You gave it. And that was when I became a ghost,  
Rioting invisibly in the halls and staircases  
Of my consecrated youth, while everything true  
And good fell from my fingers or from windows,  
Drifting like laughter in the direction of the ivy.

"Now I appear to you because at last  
I have rejoined you for ever. Life has made  
Its choices. My affairs are finally quite complete  
And there is nothing left in the world to alter.  
Whatever you teach will make no difference at all."

So saying, it hoyslshly scissored the stone sill  
With a careless stretch of the arms and a hint of flannel  
As the halls in the tower tended to tall three quarters  
And the moon behaved as it likes to do at these moments,  
Nodding above the landscape like an imprasario.

Which way it went I really couldn't say,  
But it had gone. And so I slowly continued  
My right-angled path through the heart of the college,  
Less light of foot, but somewhat enlightened,  
Slightly unsure of what I thought I had heard.

Darkness was all around me like a sixth  
Sense, or the absolute quiet of certain music  
That the hand trembles to play. And it was like  
The world pressing on its pockets of resistance,  
Like righteous claims of Iowa. Or throats of war.

And indeed, I thought, the oldmate chaos will surely be  
A predicate of just this irresponsible architecture  
Of convinced laws and prayers that maddled for years  
With the best of fateful intentions until the wind changed.  
The words were in my head like an egg in a hostile.

Thoughts too late to unthink: I had the feeling  
Of being betrayed by something of my choosing,  
Something I had counseled at, something belonging  
To the projection of a long-suppressed falling,  
Haunted by the forces it exploits.

John Fuller

# The linguistic and the psychotic

John Forrester

JACQUES LACAN  
Le Séminaire, Livre III: Les Psychoses  
366pp. Paris: Seuil.  
2 02 99 6026 4

"Fou Lacan". With this pun ("fou" le camp), the front page of the French daily, *Libération*, announced the death in September 1981, of Jacques Lacan; there followed nine pages devoted to the event. Lacan's influence on the intellectual life of France is indisputable — as great as Sartre's, perhaps the single most important influence since the Second World War. Its index is not given by the knowing, or not so knowing, references to Lacanian concepts, or the flood of unreadable articles and books so obviously influenced by his style. The readers of *Libération* who would avidly read nine pages devoted to that uniquely unsymbolic event, the death of a man, were also those who, over the years, packed the auditoriums where Lacan spoke, and who might, by dint of circumstance and confusion, find themselves on the couches of the 5,000 or so analysts who practise the art in France (most of them, of course, in Paris).

In Britain, where we have mobilized our common sense to resist the epigones of Freud, we feel entitled to pay little attention to the passing of the French Freud, whose life and work, we now suspect, reveals in the most clear-cut fashion that the Emperor, whether an austere Austrian Jew or a surrealistically inclined French psychiatrist, has no clothes. And it is certainly no coincidence that the most intellectually sensitive attack on Lacan's theories to date, Derrida's of some ten years back, opened with a discussion of the passage in *The Interpretation of Dreams* concerned with dreams of nudity and self-exposure, where Freud commented on Hans Christian Andersen's story. Yet Derrida's point was one that runs counter to our "Anglo-Saxon" desire to dispense with such Christians altogether; he wished to show that the moment of revelation, in which a small child indicates to the audience that the truth is naked before them, is only that they can "open their eyes" to see it, is in one more version of the theory of truth as "revelation" or disclosing, a theory to which Lacan appeared to subscribe.

Lacan's career was a demonstration of those effects of speech which he claimed psychoanalysis was uniquely placed to study. On the one hand, he was a conventional professional man, who worked at his chosen trade for fifty or so years. On the other, he willingly opened up the Pandora's box of shamanism, charlatanism, modishness and duperly. It wasn't until he was sixty-five that a collection of his writings, which had previously appeared in specialist journals, was published. And by that time he was already both famous and infamous — for his charismatic effect on his disciples, for his rehabilitation of Freudian theory, and for the inevitable schisms and dissensions that surrounded his person.

The history of the psychosocial movement in France is inextricably bound up with his personal destiny. Jacques Lacan was born in Paris on April 13, 1901, the son of Emile Baudry and Alice Lacan, a *bon bourgeois*. Educated by the Jesuits, he trained as a doctor and then as a psychiatrist. His first professional communication was given in 1926 and his doctoral thesis, of 1932, was on the parapsychoses in their relation to the personality. His academic mentors, if he had any, were Henri Claude and Georges de Clérambault. The former had been instrumental in allowing those French psychiatrists who first took an interest in Freud the freedom to try out the new ideas, at a time when such "German" "pansexualism" met with a chauvinistic and morally outraged response from much of the medical profession. Clérambault was famous for his nosological innovation of mental automatism and for his linguistic expertise and encyclopedic knowledge of the history of ideas.

Lacan, however, was such an independent of his mentors, and joined the group L'Évolution Psychiatrique,

which introduced Freudian ideas into France and was also open to the "functionalist" approach of the English evolutionists (Jackson, Hestd) as well as the phenomenological school that developed in Zürich and Germany during the 1920s and became the psychiatric avant-garde in the 1930s (Jaspers, Minkowski, Binswanger).

The young Lacan was not just an ambitious and dedicated psychiatrist. He was from early on a member of the surrealist circles around André Breton — writing poetry, and inviting his artistic friends to the open spaces of the

communicated itself in the enthusiasm with which he encountered the psychoanalytic work that Wilfred Bion had started. To Lacan, for a brief moment, it seemed that Bion's group analysis was the way of the future. Such a surprising rapprochement was perhaps facilitated by the ideas that Lacan was producing at the time, as expressed in a 1945 paper on the logic of groups — his first publication for seven years. Certainly the practical consequences of this paper were to be momentous, since, in following out the logic of his argument concerning the nature of time and its relation to action



Jacques Lacan

Hôpital Sainte-Anne, where they decorated the walls and conducted experiments in automatic writing. But, having written two pieces for the surrealist magazine *Le Minotaure* in 1933, he appears to have dropped his links with these groups.

Lacan presented a first version of his "Mirror-stage" paper to the International Psychoanalytical Congress at Marienbad. An article that he wrote for the *Encyclopédie Française* in 1938, and a paper called "Au-delà du principe de réalité", give an idea of the density of the conceptual apparatus he had already elaborated around the concept of the mirror stage, in which are played out the essential elements of Freud's conception of narcissism and of Hegel's death-struggle between master and slave. The distinctive predilections of Lacan were already present: an extraordinary fidelity to Freud; an unremitting suspicion of the intellectual modes of his time, including the "humanistic" innovations associated with phenomenology, to which he early as 1933, in a review of Minkowski's classic work on the pathology of time, he had opposed the more rigorous and asoteric philosophy of Heidegger; and the new Hegelianism that he had imbibed in the lectures of Alexandre Kojève from 1933-39.

At the end of the war, Lacan made a journey to London in search of a moral climate that owed its strength to a war spent in defence and struggle; rather than in capitulation and deception; his sense of "revelation" as being outside France was marked, and com-

and hesitation, Lacan began to vary the length of his own analytic sessions. It was this variation in the time bought by the patient that was to be a weapon brandished at Lacan in 1953, in the first of the international disputes he was party to, and then again in 1963, when the International Psychoanalytical Association made it a condition of affiliation for the French group to which Lacan belonged that he be expelled from their list of analysts authorized to teach and train other analysts, on the grounds that he failed to conform to the Code of Practice guaranteeing the patient that the length of the session be fixed in advance. Whatever the exact nature of his technique, either at this time or in later years, when rumours of five-minute sessions were rife, it was this issue that decided his excommunication.

By 1952 it was clear that Lacan was one of the handful of prestigious teachers and analysts in France. When the old Society split, due partly to personality clashes and partly to the authoritarian and machiavellian manoeuvrings of those opposed to Lacan's group, he emerged as the intellectual force behind an increasingly distinctive conception of psychoanalysis. His famous Rome Discourse of 1953 supplied the manifesto and the programme for research for the new Société Française de Psychanalyse. From the late 1940s Lacan's forte had been recognized as the analysis of and commentary upon the writings of Freud. From 1951 on, he gave a yearly seminar on these

and, with the foundation of a new

Society, this became the focus of the students' education in psychoanalytic theory. It also soon became the centre of gravity for diverse Parisian intellectuals — for Foucault, Sollers, Althusser. By 1963, when Lacan was forced to transfer the *seminaire* from Sainte-Anne to the Ecole Normale, over 500 people were attending. By the mid-1970s, the weekly showing was well over 1,000. It was this platform that gave Lacan his fame.

Lacan's teaching, however, always moved ahead of his followers, not only to outstrip the hounds of Artemis (as he portrayed them) but also because of the disiectal instability of his thought. Lacan was a didact, not a theorist, and deliberately distorted and compressed the teachings of his *seminaire* in his *Écrits*. In consequence, the verbatim transcriptions of the *seminaires* themselves are far easier to comprehend. There may be even more digressions, but they can be seen to have an immediate explanation: a guest lecture from a visiting luminary of the previous evening; a particularly obscure paper from the recent literature which provides a useful opportunity to demonstrate technical or theoretical errors and their consequences.

Even though Lacan responded immediately to such topical events, and even though his teaching constantly moved on, discarding concepts that had been around for enough time to serve their purpose (average turnover about four years), each *seminaire* is built out of a set of themes that Lacan would return to, year in year out. Not just those with which he has become associated — the supremacy of the signifier over the signified, the iron law of the father, the decentring of the subject, the vitriolic attacks on ego-psychology and the "American way of human engineering", the delight in the play of mirrors which the mirror-phase and the Other introduced into the anxious search for a "sense of self-identity" that psychoanalysis both provokes and cures — but also a set of abiding cultural, philosophical and epistemological themes to which he anchored his thought. Most particularly, every *seminaire* contained long ruminations on the nature of the symbol: its status as writing, its insertion into a combinatorial system, its function in mathematical formulae and, of course, a demonstration of its rhetorical resources.

Hence the basic framework of the Lacanian *seminaire* was three-fold: firstly, the Freudian texts or texts that were the proper object of the group's discussion; secondly, the point which Lacan's theoretical elaborations had already attained, as measured by the extent to which students and disciples had engaged with his teaching; thirdly, a relatively constant set of cultural landmarks providing the settings for Lacan's psychoanalytic theory and practice.

In *Séminaire III* on *Les Psychoses*, from 1955-56, two main themes emerge. Over the previous year, Lacan had begun to emphasize the difference between the "Other" and the "Other"; the first is equivalent to the image of the mirror-phase — it is the ego, the cornerstone of the "imaginaire", the universal fellow-man of ideals, the impersonal other of intersubjectivity (the "one" of English; the "on" of French — whom Freud called the *Milieu*). Lacan's distinctive approach to the tension between solipsism and irretrievable otherness generated by the Kantian tradition and discussed, recently by Sartre, was to avoid transcendentalism. Two questions initiated this "phenomenology": "Why is it only man who plays with dice? Why is it that the planets do not speak?"

A preliminary answer to these questions invokes Pascal: on the one hand, his realization of the wordless horror of the empty spaces that Newtonian geometrization establishes; on the other, the challenge he posed to any independent existence for God in the wager that he, as the first statistician, could propose, but which even the atheistical Laplace could not

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# The holiest place in all creation

Garth Fowden

E. D. Hunt

Ifoly Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312-440  
269pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press. £16.50.  
0 19 826438 0

Of the proposition that travel narrows the mind, there is no better illustration than the history of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land. For the western visitor it requires a supreme imaginative effort to glimpse Golgotha and the empty tomb behind the Levantine sandstone of the Church of the Resurrection; while the cosmopolitan communities that guard the holy places continue to this day to expend a considerable part of their energies on political squabbles of a strangely fascinating insignificance. Instead of illuminating spiritual mysteries, the holy places have too often sown discord and bred mutual contempt among the faithful who come from every corner of the earth to worship in them.

But Christians have at least agreed in attributing the holiness of Jerusalem, and Palestine in general, to the fact that it was the scene of Christ's life and death. Like Muslims, who revere Jerusalem as the scene of Muhammad's ascent into heaven, Christians think of the holiness of the holy places as deriving from their association with historical events. In contrast to Judaism, the third of the great monotheistic religions that regard Palestine as holy, does so because it is the land promised to Abraham by Yahweh, and therefore intrinsically holy.

In the ancient world, both the Jews' monotheism and their obsession with Temple, City and Land marked them apart from other religious traditions; and it was only by detaching belief in the One God from the construction of a narrow Jewish ethnicity that Christ was able to lay the foundations of a universal religion. Christianity emphasized community of spirit, not of race; and in Paul and the evangelist John we see the Temple de-territorialized, personalized in Christ. Jerusalem, the City of David, is metamorphosed into the "Jerusalem which is above," which is the "Mother of us all" of the Epistle to the Galatians, and into the symbolic celestial city, shining with gold and studded with jewels, of Revelation. From the Montanists' removal of the holy city of Phrygia, to Blinke's aspiration to build Jerusalem "in England's green and pleasant land," this powerful idea has stuck fast in the Christian mind, countering the natural urge to visit the earthly scene of Christ's life with an assertion that, as Jerome put it, "the heavenly sanctuary is open for Britain no less than for Jerusalem, for the kingdom of God is within you".

But Jerusalem is doubly unique among cities. In that it not only transmits history into symbol, but may also transform myth into history. The early Church, concerned to avoid becoming just another mystery religion, always emphasized the historical roots of its faith; and the pursuit of the historical Jews naturally led to renewed interest in the land where Christ had lived. Three hundred years after the crucifixion, Golgotha and the Tomb were brought once more to light, and adorned with glorious shrines by the Christian emperor Constantine. Even though it is not probable that the memory of these major sites had been preserved intact by the local faithful, there were about to emerge numerous smaller holy places that owed less to genuine tradition than to the Orientals' celebrated delirium to let a tourist depart empty-handed. In the story of the christian holy places, the line between genuine historical reminiscence and historicized myth is never easy to draw. As we descend the scale of historical probability from sites associated with biblical events recorded to the Scriptures, by way of the "Tombs of the Prophets" to the grave of Adam (improbably located immediately beneath Golgotha), we trace the emergence of Jerusalem as the mythological par excellence.

As a late antique historian, E. D. Hunt is privileged to encounter Jerusalem as it passes through one of its most intensely creative phases. He rightly draws attention to Origen's insistence on the Roman's destruction of Jewish Jerusalem as ensuring the way to the establishment of the heavenly City presaged by Christ; and to Eusebius of Caesarea's interpretation (echoed in the apse-mosaic of S. Pudenziana in Rome) of Constantine's *Anastasis* basilica as the "new Jerusalem" of the Apocalypse. The Jerusalem monuments were clearly intended, and certainly ideally suited, to play a role of their own in the immense evangelistic and didactic task set itself by the fourth-century Church; and it is with the development of Jerusalem from a holy place of essentially local significance into a spiritual focus for the whole of Christianity that Hunt's book is primarily concerned.

After two introductory chapters on the holy places themselves and the historical and legendary role of Constantine's ninth-century Helena in their establishment, there follow three synthetic chapters describing the gradual evolution of the actual journey to Jerusalem into an integral part of the pilgrimage; the overwhelmingly biblical interests of the pilgrims; and the influential liturgical cycle developed in Jerusalem in response to the same historical, commemorative and biblical pre-occupations that characterized devotion to the holy places themselves. A transitional chapter deals with the increasing dispersion of relics from Jerusalem throughout the whole empire, and the devotion they stimulated; with the growing wealth of the holy places; and with the realities of life in what was still, after all, a Roman colony and military camp as well as the Heavenly City. Then the final, more narrative section of the book discusses the Holy Land involvements of the court of Theodosius I, the ecclesiastical bickering of the late fourth and early fifth centuries (Palladius, Jerome, the Origenist controversy, Pelagianism, the aftermath of Chalcedon), and the beneficial activities of the Empress Eudocia, who did as much for the Christian holy places as anyone after Constantine. The part played by Imperial patronage in the evolution of the holy places and the pilgrimages, as one might expect, one of Hunt's major themes.

This erudite and sympathetic first book is a model of critical scholarship; applied to a strictly delimited area; and, if a chauvinistic note may be excused, its notes reveal the impressive extent of the contribution that is being

made by the present generation of British scholars to our understanding of the social and religious history of the later Roman empire. But Hunt's success in the descriptive task he has set himself makes one regret all the more the occasional lack of a wider context for his discussion. As a classicist, he consults Greek and Latin sources; but on his own admission the overwhelming majority of Holy Land pilgrims were Orientals, many of them ignorant even of Greek. The modern visitor to Jerusalem during Holy Week quickly senses the contrast of style between Eastern and Western pieties, a contrast echoed in the surprise of the fourth-century Spanish pilgrim Egeria at the "remarkable" displays of tearful emotion in the Good Friday congregation. The Oriental pilgrims were more numerous, and more ordinary, than those who had the leisure and resources to come from further afield. They carried with them their own atmosphere of excited devotion, which was intensified by the self-confidence of the group, just like the pre-revolutionary Russian pilgrims so memorably described in Stephen Graham's *With the Russian Pilgrims to Jerusalem*. Recent discoveries of Armenian graffiti in Sinai, first published in 1979 but not referred to by Hunt, are already transforming our understanding of pilgrim-routes in that area; and it may perhaps be that a careful investigation

of the Syriac, Coptic and Armenian literary sources will one day illuminate this neglected oriental aspect of the Holy Land pilgrimage.

Hunt's observation that the new prestige of the Christian Jerusalem is only once mentioned in any pagan source suggests another neglected perspective. Following Jerome, Hunt regards the Christian pilgrims as heirs to the Greek and Roman habit of secular, and often learned, tourism in the manner of Herodotus and Pausanias. Such an analogy, valid perhaps for an Origen or a Eusebius, could have meant nothing to the Syrian peasant or the Mesopotamian monk. But paganism has had an abundance of its own sacred places, and festivals associated with them. Christianity, as a universal and supposedly monolithic religion, necessarily found its holiest shrines—those associated with the life of its founder—concentrated in one corner of the empire; but although much Christian pilgrimage was consequently conducted on an unprecedented geographical scale, it was not different in intention from its more localized pagan antecedents. Indeed, the greatest of pagan shrines, such as Delphi, had been equally capable of attracting visitors from far afield.

There are also interesting analogies between the Christian pilgrimage and the *peregrinatio* of some of the later Neoplatonists, such as Julian, Proclus

and others among the fifth-century Athenians and Alexandrians, making extended journeys to pagan temples and other holy places. And just as Origen treated the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness of Sinai as an allegory of the soul's search for illumination, so the Neoplatonists interpreted the journey of Odysseus in a similar spirit. It is very likely that these late pagan intellectuals were imitating the Christian pilgrimage; but it does seem that a taste for travelling to holy places was part of the *Zelgeit*. Recent work on the late antique idea of the holy, especially associated with the names of Peter Brown and J. Z. Smith—has led to argue that in this period the holy place was giving way to the holy man, the focus of popular awe and devotion. The truth seems to be that all the indisputable prestige of the holy man among both pagans and Christians, men continued to feel a need for a spirit of place in the devotions. Throughout antiquity, philosophers and men of religion had wanted to live in temples where the divine was embodied; but the holy man, however mobile, even when his life was encased in his death in a tomb and a pilgrimage-church and became a fixed focus of cult. At Jerusalem the tomb was empty; but his occupant was the Son of God, and his site, like Delphi, had become the centre of a earth, the holiest place in all creation.

## Sorting out the scraps

Geza Vermes

MAURICE BAILLET (Editor)

Qumran Grotto 4: Volume 3 (4Q482-4Q520)  
Discoveries in the Judean Desert 7  
420pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press. £60.  
0 19 826321 X

With Volume Seven, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert*, begun in the mid-1950s as a vehicle for the publication of the manuscript fragments found in the Dead Sea caves, completes about a third of its planned twenty or so instalments. The first four volumes, issued between 1955 and 1965, rated as major events in Qumran research; each made a new and notable contribution to learning. Volumes Five and Six, by contrast, left an impression of *debris*. The same has to be said of Maurice Baillet's painstakingly

executed and expert offering, which supplements our understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls and of the religious community responsible for them to a degree quite disproportionate to its length and price. A considerable amount of the material is composed of minute scraps of text ranging from the insignificant to the meaningless. Indeed, it might seem with hindsight that the person in charge of the whole project should have insisted on evaluating the fragments, giving chronological precedence to those possessing genuine importance.

Of the five sections of the volume, the first (Apocrypha and varia) and the last (Papyrus fragments) include nothing worthy of comment. Section Two comprises six incomplete copies of the *War Rule*, nineteen more or less well preserved columns of which have been known since 1954. Section Three provides a large quantity of liturgical fragments (hymns and prayers) and a collection of badly damaged texts which the editor, perhaps over-

optimistically, believes he can identify as a marriage ritual. The most important items here belong to the "Words of Lullianus", known since 1961 thanks to its partial publication by Baillet himself, and to a composition entitled "Canticle of Sage" in which the author combines praise of God with the expansion of the *Shema*. Section Four yields two well conserved legal texts dealing with ritual purity.

Maurice Baillet, already renowned for his edition of texts from the cave of Qumran, has spent, on and off, eighteen years on preparing this book, and to having had to wait another year between completing his typescript and its actual publication. He deserves sympathy. At the same time, he has to himself in his introduction to be a man with a distinctly limp upper lip, who inclines to grumble about the members of the famous "International and Interconfessional team" entrusted in 1953-54 with the fragments from Cave 4. Although he was co-edited in 1952 on the "unfortunate" editing small fragments from Cave 3, and 6-10, he was not admitted to the inner sanctum of Cave 4 until 1968. Even then, Fatah Z. de Vaux, the editor-in-chief, obliged him to accept 2057 scraps of worthless papyrus, while none of the others was prepared to touch. Worse still, when one or two kind colleagues took pity on him and transferred to him several interesting pieces, two (anonymous) members of the group tried (unsuccessfully) to take even some of these worthless documents from him. A more serious complaint is that a named member of the team (J. T. Milik) was guilty of the "savagery" publication (in a popularized edition by myself) of several fragments belonging to Baillet's lot.

The post-1967 Israeli administration of the Rockefeller Museum, with its chemists and physicists and its regulations enforced by a watchful staff, is compared unfavourably with the happy-go-lucky days, and those of us who regret the easy life preceding (and following) 1967, will find it scandalous that publication should have been so long delayed. The editor is referred to by his colleagues as "the saintly" (in a popularized edition by myself) of several fragments belonging to Baillet's lot.

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Laurence Lerner

## Disturber of the peace

S. N. Plaipe

THOMAS BERNHARD

Ein Kind

167pp. Salzburg: Residenz.

With the publication of *Ein Kind*, the Austrian novelist and dramatist Thomas Bernhard completes the autobiographical sequence dealing with his early life. Astonishingly, all five volumes cover only his first nineteen years to 1950. Illegitimacy, war-time Salzburg, the Allied bombings, brutal schooling, pleurisy, tuberculosis—it would be hard to imagine a more harrowing sequence of experiences than that which befell Bernhard as a boy. The remorseless awfulness of his youth is relieved by two salutary influences—his sympathetic grandfather and his musical studies. Yet even these two compensations are soon withdrawn: his grandfather dies in the same hospital where he himself is lying dangerously ill, and his weakened lungs prevent him from pursuing the singing career he has aspired to since boyhood.

*Die Ursache* (1975) is divided into two parts, the first describing the authoritarianism of Grünkranz, the pro-Nazi director of the private boarding-school Bernhard attended in war-time Salzburg. The second part describes the replacement after the war of the school's National Socialist ethos by Catholicism, when the welfare of the pupils was transferred to the priest Uncle Franz. The portrait of Hitler in the refectory was replaced by the crucifix, Grünkranz's Nazi salute at breakfast by Uncle Franz saying grace. But for Bernhard nothing had altered. The transition from Nazism to Catholicism was effected with no appreciable change in the routine and discipline of the school. He sees the Catholicism of Salzburg as the passive form of Fascism, and continually challenges the myth of the city as a beautiful cultural centre: "the sudden tipping of the scales in favour of National Socialism is possible here at any time".

When Bernhard walks round Salzburg and revisits the locations of the bombings and the air-raid shelters, where he remembers people apocalyptically and dismembered, corpses laid out on the grass, where he himself was rescued along with Grünkranz from under the rubble of the destroyed school, he finds nobody who remembers now. This collective loss of memory is a symptom of what he calls the city's "Catholic-Nationalist stupidity".

*Die Ursache*, written in deliberately inflammatory and polemical style, did not pass unchallenged. Uncle Franz himself instigated legal proceedings in the Salzburg district court to establish "whether a writer may really go unpunished for lying and insulting", and Bernhard was forced to make excursions in the paperback edition. But in the second volume, *Der Keller* (1976), he steps up his attack on the Salzburg authorities. He describes how at an early age he chose to align himself with the "dregs" of the city. One day instead of going to school he simply went "in the opposite direction" to work to the slum quarter, the Scherzhausersiedlung. The whole motivation of Bernhard's life and work, as he never tires of reiterating, stems from contradiction and opposition, "Gegensatz". The bulk of his life at school is immediately reversed by his new activity and responsibility in the cellar where he is employed as a grocery boy. But suicide is still very much part of the mind; a preoccupation which is hardly surprising for an Austrian writer whose home city is Salzburg, Austria.

There cannot be many eighteenth-century writers as important, and even as Karl Philipp Moritz who has had to wait so long for the first collected edition of their writings to be put together. Horst Günther's edition, *Karl Philipp Moritz: Werke*, Three Volumes, 2400pp. Insel Verlag 1981, DM 98.3 458 04772 7) contains the letters, the travel writings, the essays, and miscellaneous essays, typical of the odd-job man of letters living in eighteenth-century

has one of the highest suicide rates in Western Europe and, as an epigraph to *Die Ursache*, Bernhard quotes the statistic that two thousand people a year try to kill themselves in the district of Salzburg alone. A tenth of these are successful. "My home city," he concludes in *Der Keller*, "is in reality a deadly disease".

Disease and death are the backdrop to the third and fourth volumes in which the author is shunted through a succession of lugubrious hospitals. In *Der Keller* (1976), he describes his recovery from pleurisy as an act of will. The patient next to him in the cramped bathroom to which patients are removed from the terminal ward in expectation of their imminent death dies, and some heavy wet washing hanging above falls on top of Bernhard—another ten centimetres and it would have fallen on his face and suffocated him. These two events determine his decision to live: "It was up to me whether I went on breathing or not". Yet this affirmation of life is followed by another sequence of disasters. His grandfather dies, and on the same day he suffers a relapse. He only discovers the fact of his grandfather's death several days later, from a newspaper. Transferred to a convalescent home on the road to recovery, Bernhard contracts TB and is despatched to the sanatorium at Grafenhof.

In Grafenhof, Bernhard's medical history takes a series of almost incredible turns. *Die Kälte* (1981) documents the series of false diagnoses, painful treatments and incompetent mistakes by doctors. He is pronounced positive, then negative

(his mucus hittle has inadvertently been mixed up with that of another patient) then positive again. After nine months he is discharged ostensibly cured, only to be told two days later that another doctor that he has a hole in his lung. This ludicrous sequence of medical blunders reaches a climax in the current scene where Bernhard is obliged to instruct an inexperienced doctor in the method of filling his pneumo-peritoneum, a device inserted into the thorax to conduct air to his diseased lung. Yet even when describing the excruciating ineptitude of the doctor as he attempts by trial and error to force the syringe through the stomach wall, Bernhard is surely exploiting the ironies of his own suffering for literary effect. It is as if he enjoys presenting reality as a private vendetta against himself.

The last and most straightforward memoir in the sequence, *Ein Kind*, is in fact chronologically the first. It covers Bernhard's earliest years, from his birth in Holland (his mother couldn't face the scandal of bearing an illegitimate child in her own village in Austria) up to the age of thirteen. It opens with an account of his first elated bicycle ride which ends with a broken chain in a thunderstorm miles from home, ominous portents for the future. Bernhard's grandfather, an obscure writer and amateur philosopher, is the dominant influence of these early years. (The manuscript of his greatest work, Bernhard tells us in an anecdote worthy of Woody Allen, was eaten by a goat.) At the local German primary school Thomas is an Austrian outcast and learns nothing. His real schooling

comes during walks with his grandfather and the brief happy spells of his childhood are spent with his grandparents in the country. At home, the boy's presence reminds his mother of his father's desertion, and she beats him mercilessly for the slightest transgression. Physical and emotional deprivation are heightened by the general poverty of the 1930s and the brutal tactics of Nazism so despised by his grandfather. Death fascinates him from an early age, but when he sees an Allied bomber shot down, the dismembered remains of the air-crew upon his eyes in the grotesqueness of death and war and provide a foretaste of the horrors of Salzburg.

Bernhard deliberately arranges his narrative to present the most disturbing picture of youth he can. The tendency of the sinuous, unparaphrased and unpunctuated prose is towards hyperbole. Huge compound nouns are constructed to describe the hostile intrusiveness of the institutions that confine him—"institutions-for-the-destruction-of-mind" (schools), "death-production-line" (hospital)—and certain sinister phrases are raised again and again from the text in italics. In horror, in disbelief, almost as if Bernhard supposes that language itself has conspired against him.

At one point in *Der Keller*, Bernhard describes himself as a "disturber of the peace". All his life he has been an irritant and thorn in the side of everyone, from members of his own family to readers of his work. From these books it is easy to see how the course of his early life determined his

subsequent literary policy: to offer derangement and provocation where readers and audiences look for diversion and entertainment. In recent years, German and Austrian theatre-goers have been subjected to Bernhard's ruthless attacks on their most sacred institutions. They have seen the Salzburger Festspele, Immanuel Kant, and a thinly-disguised ex-Nazi Minister President lambasted in his plays. They are perhaps by now inured to watching popular dramatists foul the nest of German cultural traditions. But the inventive of these volumes is much more persuasive than that of the plays or novels. The provocation lies in the fact that they are autobiographical truth, or as close to the truth as Bernhard feels he can get, since he has no illusions about the possibility of any faithful reproduction of past events. As he states in *Der Keller*:

What I am describing here is the truth, and yet it is not the truth, because it cannot be the truth. In all our reading we have never read a sentence of truth, no matter how many hooks we have read about actual events. Lies are repeatedly presented as truth, the truth is lies et cetera. It's a question of whether we want to lie or tell and write the truth, even if it can never be the truth, never in the truth.

The chain of paradox is extended: this statement itself, like his autobiography as a whole, is not immune from the possibility of falsehood. Yet it is precisely such statements which give these books a personal authenticity which more than compensates for the impossibility of historical truth.

## The flight from love

Margaret McHaffie

PETER HÄRTLING

Die dreifache Maria  
124pp. Darmstadt: Luchterhand.  
3 472 86546 6

Peter Härtling deploys elements from the biography of the nineteenth-century Swabian poet Eduard Mörike to illustrate some of the peculiar dangers which beset the artist, dangers to which he is exposed by a more than usual sensitivity and vulnerability, and which he survives by his ability to transform the turmoil of experience into the tranquillity of poetry. The story spans more than thirty years of Mörike's life, beginning with his adolescence and breaking off in 1851 when he marries Margarethe von Thaes. The narrative technique, episodic, but the episodes are well chosen to throw light on Mörike's character and the sources of his poetry.

The story begins with Mörike's flight from the theological seminary in Tübingen to seek refuge with his family in Stuttgart. The flight is precipitated by the news that Maria has arrived in Tübingen in search of him. Härtling skilfully arouses the reader's curiosity about the woman who produces in Mörike a panic which manifests itself as always when he is under emotional stress, in the symptoms of physical illness. Initially Maria is referred to only as someone from whom Mörike flees, someone whom he thinks of as a feminine counterpart to Mozart's Don Giovanni—both of them beings whose destructive charm wreaks havoc in the lives of those who fall under their spell.

Härtling heightens suspense by delaying further revelations about Maria Meyer until he has dealt with Mörike's earlier love for his cousin Klärle Neuffer. The relationship with

Klärle displays the timorousness and hesitancy, the distress at his "sinful" thoughts and reluctance to commit himself fully, which appear again in more intense form in his encounter with Maria. As the passion grows from childhood to adolescence, Klärle's feelings cool. In the end, she rejects Mörike, the mediocre student of theology, the would-be poet, and becomes engaged to someone who is theologically sounder, financially better off and far more likely than her cousin to offer her stability and prosperity. Mörike is both relieved and hurt by her rejection of him. Later, as in the case of Maria, the pain of unhappy love becomes the material for poetry.

The central part of the story, however, revolves round the mysterious figure of Maria Meyer. Härtling prefaces the description of the meeting between her and Mörike with an account of the first twenty years of her life. Born in Seehausen in 1802 as the eldest illegitimate child of a notorious mother, Maria makes early acquaintance with poverty and

adversity and shows great resourcefulness in dealing with them. She learns to exploit her extraordinary beauty and her remarkable histrionic talents to beguile a succession of benefactor-validators, playing with each of them whichever role seems appropriate. Her inventiveness and audacity are boundless. The people who shelter her remain ignorant of her real origins. She appears to them out of nowhere, stays with them until her hectic restlessness drives her on, and vanishes as mysteriously as she has come. For many years before her meeting with Mörike, she has lived the life of an adventuress and romantic vignette. When their paths cross in 1823, she is twenty-one, he is nineteen. He is fascinated by her beauty and the sum of mystery which surrounds her; she sees in the "poet" a possibility of release from the violence of her tempestuous nature. Their fleeting encounter culminates in the strange dream-like hours which they and Leimbauer spend in the abandoned pavilion of the overgrown garden, where almost every Romantic cliché is employed to suggest the temptations of

sinfulness and sensuality. Mörike leaves Ludwigsburg next day without seeing Maria and resists her repeated entreaties for them to meet again. In time, he transforms his memories of her into the figure of the *Verführerin* (the temptress) and that of the *gypsy girl* in his novel *Maler Nolten*. In time, she withdraws into the respectable obscurity of married life with the carpenter Kohler.

The narrative is embellished with quotations from Mörike's poems which underline Härtling's basic theme. He also emphasizes how important Mozart was for Mörike; Mozart was the artist to whom he felt most akin and *Don Giovanni* the opera he admired above all others. His veneration for the composer finds expression in his masterly *Käseleimovelle*, *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*. The fact that Härtling's protagonist is also an artist prompts the reader to compare the two stories. If, in this comparison, *Die dreifache Maria* is seen to fall short of Mörike's wonderfully concentrated novella, it is nevertheless an interesting variant on the familiar theme.

## Light on the grey areas

John Neves

MAX VON DER GRÜN

Späte Liebe  
173pp. Darmstadt: Luchterhand.

Max von der Grün's latest novella tells the story of a couple in their seventies who decide against all the odds to get married. It makes a happy contrast with a book such as *Fleckenbrot*, in which he recounted the misery of long-term unemployment. But the setting is the same, and so indeed is the *kleinbürgerlich* atmosphere of the Ruhr families who people it. Max von der Grün describes the lives of lower middle class and working class Germans without any romanticism. They are modest people, they work hard, but they are constantly struggling against *Schicksalsschläge*—blows of fate.

In *Späte Liebe*, however, it is almost as if he had awarded himself something of a break from this reality, for the low affair of the widowed Frau Gmeiner and the widower Herr Burger is the

happiest thing that could possibly happen to both. And it happens very quickly. Even von der Grün's fondness for detailed descriptions of *petit bourgeois* homes does not prevent the couple arriving at the point of no return after a couple of meetings or so.

The episode of their excursion to the Rhine in a bus full of pensioners reminds us that von der Grün's books are an acquired taste, in spite of his superficially conventional style. The reader must come to terms with his social classes which interest him (and from which he himself springs). He wants to be aware of Burger's weak heart, which is never going to get any better; of the envy of the couple's friends; of the severely limited nature of their lives, which will continue to restrict their imaginations after they return from their exciting honeymoon in Paris; and of the difficulties involved in getting on with their relatives and friends in the new circumstances.

Life in the environment von der Grün depicts is not only modest and insecure; it is also tough and hard-bitten. Hard words fly at a moment's notice. People who have conflicting interests are forced to co-operate. What is to become of Gretl's friend Hildegard now that Gretl is marrying again? How will her daughter-in-law, of whom she has never approved, take the news? She even gets involved in a heated argument with her spouse-to-be over the tailor's sewing machine he wants to bring with him into the new household.

*Späte Liebe* is remarkable, though, for its psychological balance. Von der Grün never loses sight of the good fortune that has befallen his septuagenarian lovers, and shows us how fragile the life of a conventional married couple (that of Gretl's son and daughter-in-law) can be, by comparison. Gretl's grand-daughter Susanne even arrives at the end of the book as a temporary refuge from her parents, who have started to quarrel about the finances for their new house. As the finances for their new house falls through, Von der Grün's world is full of conflicts; resolution is inevitable, but unexpected, and chillingly sudden. The greyness of industrial Westphalia and its underprivileged society have found in Von der Grün a gifted poet.

T. J. Reed